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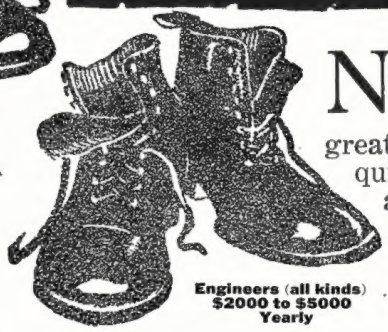

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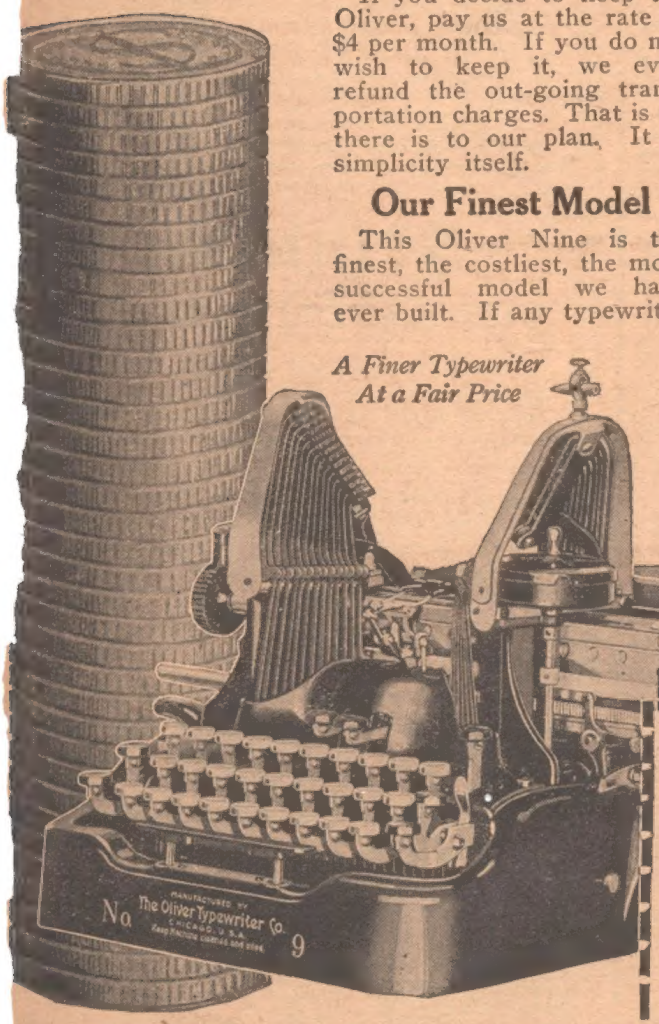

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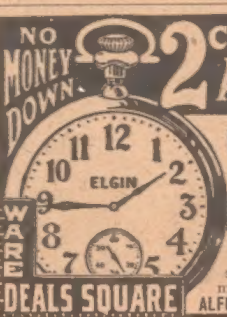

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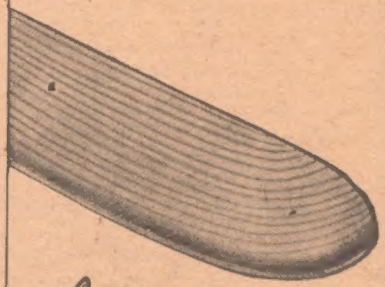

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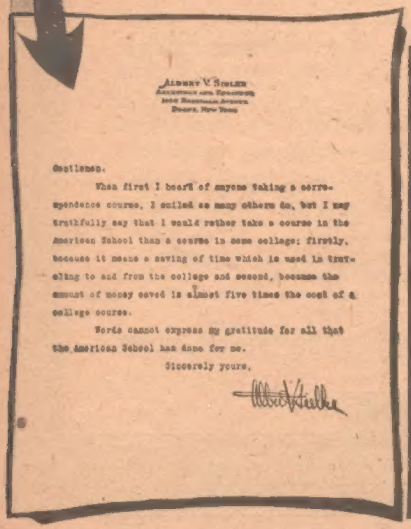

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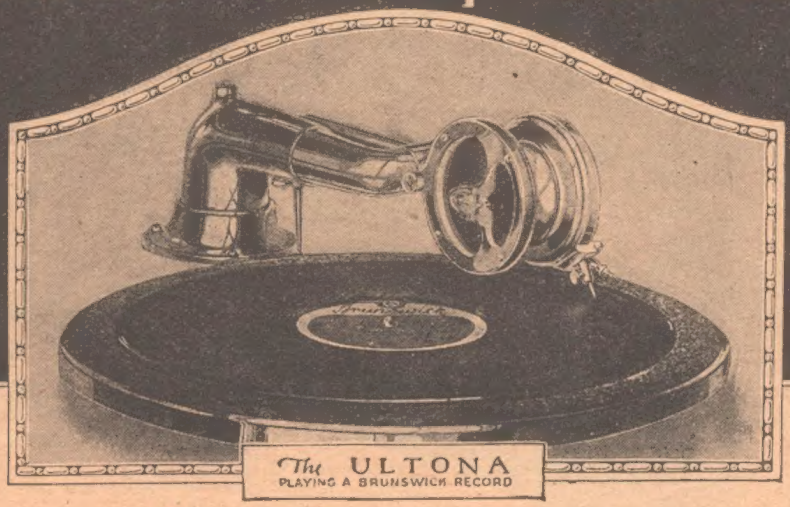

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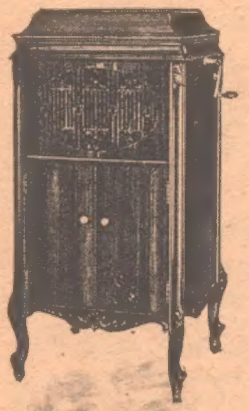

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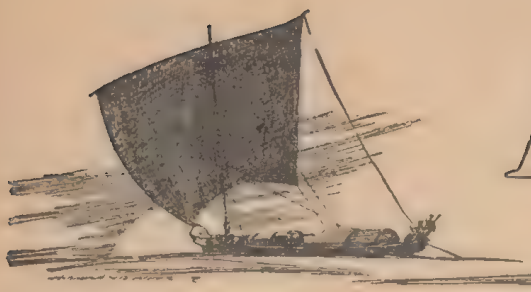

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

IN ANCIENT days, *Alacha the Slayer*, abetted by his master, the Monarch of Hindustan, oppressed the people of Afghanistan until they turned to *Abdul Dost* and *Khlit* for relief. Then the curved sword brought blood upon the land. "The Curved Sword," a complete novel by Harold Lamb, in our next issue. *Other stories in the First November* ADVENTURE *are described on the last page of this issue.*

Adventure

Vol. XXVII
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Mid-October

1920

The Bushfighters

A Complete Novel

by

Hugh Pendexter

Author of "Gentlemen of The North," "Kings of The Missouri," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE DAUGHTER OF THE ROGUE

LORD LOUDOUN of peppery temper was putting the finishing touches to his plans for reducing Ticonderoga and Crown Point, and within the space of one short year the ancient town of Albany had grown from a sleepy trading-post of Dutch burghers and smugglers to one of the most important military bases in the colonies. And this because of General Braddock's defeat the year before.

Albany in 1756 differed much from Albany of 1755. The same broad street led from the fort on the hill to the river, but the coming and going of regulars and provincials had turned the grassy sward into a dirty brown thoroughfare. The town-house and guard-house, the two churches and the market-place, still held the middle of the main street with the same brick houses of Dutch architecture lining the sides.

Dust now marred the little lawns of green, and the good *vrouws* were in despair. The passing soldiery kicked up a rare mess of dirt and disorder. Soldiers were encamped on the plains above and on the meadows below the town, and soldiers were at all hours mounting and descending the hill; for Loudoun had ten thousand men strung out between the town and the head of Lake George, and had been assured by one of his subordinates that "Every wheel shall go that rum and human flesh can move."

The bulk of the provincial troops were contributed by New England. These volunteers, going to fight the French for six shillings a month, with their rations including a daily gill of rum, wore blue uniforms with red facings, or coats of coarse blue cloth with red or blue breeches. Many of them, however, lacked such finery of war, and came in their rough workaday clothes.

Nearly all of them were farmers by occupation, and few displayed a soldierly bearing. Their coming and going infused new life into the town, and if they entered tap-rooms they also stood attentive while their chaplains daily preached to them from street-corner or in camp. Silent, lean-faced men as a rule.

The preceding year had been a bloody calendar of events. July had brought the tremendous defeat of Braddock's army, with the Pennsylvania frontier pushed back to Fort Cumberland on the Potomac. The three succeeding

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months had witnessed the failure of the expedition against Fort Niagara.

To be sure three forts had been captured in Acadia, but the colonies demanded an insurance against a danger nearer home. So the Summer of 1755 had been a dismal one, relieved only by the "bloody morning scout" before Fort William Henry on Lake George.

This affair, although it resulted in the repulse of Dieskau and in the capture of the baron himself, was only half a victory. So grateful were King and Parliament for any measure of success after the disastrous rout on the Monongahela that one made William Johnson a baronet while the other gave him twenty-five thousand dollars.

This recognition was generous inasmuch as General Phineas Lyman whipped and captured Dieskau while his commanding officer was laid up in his tent from a wound in the thigh. War was not formally declared between England and France until after their armies had clashed for a year under the ancient forests of the New World.

The dawning of 1756 found the western frontiers weltering under the tomahawk, while Ticonderoga, that "hornets' nest," was spewing forth its hordes of Miami, Potawatomi, Ottawas and "French" Mohawks to carry horror and desolation from Lake Champlain to the very outskirts of Schenectady and Albany.

Day after day the troops left Albany and its environs, and more raw volunteers entered the town to stare at the quaint houses and to quicken the eye on beholding the gay attire of the Dutch maids, so different from the sad-colored gowns of the girls at home. These farmer boys were concerned only with the present and little realized the importance of their rôle in this, the Seven Years' War, which was to rock Europe to its center and pave the way for a giant republic.

The curtain went up on the second act when the colonies received Lord Loudoun as commander-in-chief of his Majesty's forces in America. And never did a commander have a more grim and majestic stage on which to strut his little day. It extended from Vermont to the Great Lakes and included the valleys of the Mississippi and the Ohio.

The potentials of the struggle were beyond the ken of any man. Benjamin Franklin unwittingly anticipated future events when at the outset of the war he urged a colonial union. His plan was pronounced to be "too democratic," and now England was sending her Grenadiers and Highland regiments, and heaping up an expense account the payment of which within a score of years was to produce a revolution.

Prior to Braddock's defeat the citizens of Albany never dreamed that the old order was soon to be changed in their little town. When the first provincials arrived in a riot of confusion, each colony jealously holding control of supplies for its volunteers, Albany people viewed the intrusion as something that would soon pass.

At the coming of William Johnson from Fort Jonnson, accompanied by the fat Hendrick, most influential chief of the Mohawks, the knowing ones smiled. For it was common knowledge that although eleven hundred warriors of the Long House had held a four days' powwow with Johnson and had drunk much of his strong punch not more than three hundred of them were for the war. Many of these were slothful on the scout, and would explain to their allies that they were present merely to observe how their white brothers fought.

This indifference was entirely natural as many of them had friends and relatives among the Caughnawaga Indians, consisting almost entirely of Mohawks and Oneidas who had renounced paganism, who were now fighting ferociously under the banner of Louis the Fifteenth.

During the first Summer of the war the old people sat on the porches and mumbled reminiscences of the "old days." Lads and maids did their courting under the family shade-tree. The children, porringers in hand, sat expectantly in front of the houses waiting for the cows to come down the grassy street and halt, each before his owner's home, and be milked. The burghers smoked their long pipes and continued their trade with the Indians and indulged their knack for smuggling with the French across the border.

But all this was now changed. Good *vrouws* stared in amazement at the plaids and bare legs of the Highlanders, the gay uniforms of the regulars, and the occasional red and blue of the provincials, or the russet brown of the forest rangers. The growl of the drum and the pert, shrill boast of the fife drowned the mellow tinkle of cow-bells, and the sturdy young rascals, porringers in hand, were kept to the porch or in the back yard to escape being trampled upon by horses dragging ordnance and the heavy Dutch supply-wagons.

Never in the history of the frontiers had partizan warfare been waged so fiercely as now. The English, at the head of Lake George, had but few red allies and depended upon Robert Rogers of New Hampshire and his rangers—invaluable bushfighters—recruited from the colonies' picked men.

Under Rogers such men as Kennedy, Stark, Peabody, Miller, Waterbury, Hazen, Pomeroy and, perhaps best of all, Israel Putnam, met and outwitted the cunning woodcraft of the motley redskins sent forth by Marquis de Montcalm, in command at Ticonderoga. Throughout the Winter this savage warfare had gone on, streaking the deep snows with

blood, and now that Summer had nearly spent itself it was redoubled in its intensity. The scalp-yell frequently rose along the shores of George and Champlain.

Montcalm vowed he would push the frontier back to Albany. Loudoun swore he would hew a path down the Richelieu to Montreal. Montcalm's "hair-dressers" stole like shadows through the vast forests of pitch-pine and lay in ambush on the edge of alder-filled swamps, seeking to kill or capture the rangers.

Marquis de Vaudreuil, Governor of New France, developed a unique taste in bookkeeping, and lovingly added up his total of enemy scalps, and carefully listed and reported every coup of Caughnawaga or western warrior; for he was the frank champion of a system of terrorization.

The lack of red allies did not handicap the English so much as might be expected; for while Montcalm's savages captured or killed and sometimes ate rangers, also did they often refuse to obey orders. They spoiled many a pretty military maneuver by their greediness for blood-letting or by their lack of staying qualities.

EPHRAIM WILLIS, Connecticut born, lounged in the twilight before the town-house and softly cursed the August heat of the day and wished his superior would arrive and assign him to work. Ephraim had been sent to Albany from New York to serve under Captain Israel Putnam.

He had been through the Lakes George and Champlain country much before the war. He had seen much service on the Pennsylvania frontier and gained more experience in the Ohio country. What was also important, Captain Putnam knew his people; and neighbors preferred to fight and die by the side of neighbors in 1756. Ephraim's branch of the service was obvious at a glance, for despite the heat he wore a fringed hunting-shirt of dressed deerskin and a fur cap with a tail.

In place of the usual smooth-bore gun carried by the majority of northern rangers he was armed with the Kentucky type of rifle, perfected ten years before, and an ideal weapon for bush work. Rogers' rangers were less picturesque in garb, many of them wearing the rough, nondescript garments of the woodsman.

To the men loafing before the town-house Ephraim was an object of much interest. He replied readily enough to their frank questions, but displayed no inclination to volunteer information.

"From Virginny way?" asked a tall, rawboned scout, his voice suspicious, for Virginia like Pennsylvania was lukewarm in sending troops to the north.

"Monongahela. Out with Colonel Washington when Braddock was killed."

"Old Vaudreuil's sending eight thousand more reg'lars to Ticonderoga," a youthful soldier nervously informed the company.

"How do you know that, lad?" asked Willis with a humorous smile.

"Well, the whole army says it. And more'n three thousand wild Indians from beyond Michillimack'nac."

"Good! All the more for us to kill off," mumbled Willis, his gray eyes sweeping up and down the dusky hill in search of some one.

"Guess we're in for a dressing if we don't git more men," observed the tall scout.

"Don't you get licked before you get into the woods," advised Willis.

"By Godfrey! I'll raise as much hair as you will even if you do wear a pretty quill shirt," cried the tall scout.

Willis grinned into his angry face good-naturedly, then resumed his search of the long street.

"I heard my colonel say the rum won't hold out more'n four weeks. Pretty bad planning on somebody's part," complained a man from Otway's regiment.

"Too much meddling on the part of the colonies," agreed Willis. "Five different committees looking after supplies in place of one strong committee."

There followed a few minutes of silence, the group apathetically waiting for something to spur on the conversation. Then Willis spoke up, asking—

"Who's seen Cap'n Putnam, of Rogers' Rangers, in the last day or so?"

"I see him here when Lord Loudoun come. He's up in the bush somewheres now," said the youthful soldier.

"Old 'Wolf' Putnam," chuckled the tall scout. "Lord, but I'd like to been there when he dug out that wolf! Guess every one knows Wolf Putnam. And ain't he everlastingly giving them French and Indians their dressing! Prowls round Ticonderoga like he was a reg'lar wolf and it was his own chicken-coop. What do you want to see him for?"

"Do you know, I'm thinking that that's what he's going to tell *me*," gravely answered Willis.

"—— poor planning when the rum will give out in four weeks," bitterly persisted Otway's regular.

Willis turned a whimsical gaze on the lugubrious countenance, and his eyes danced with mischief as he said:

"I can tell you where you can git all the rum you want—enough to float a raft through —— Yes, sir! And it ain't far from here either."

Instantly the group was at attention, although inclined to be skeptical. Otway's man eagerly demanded—

"If you ain't making game of us, where is it?"

"In Ticonderoga," chuckled Willis. "Montcalm has enough there to keep all the Indians on the continent drunk for years. All you got to do is to take the fort, kill off the Indians, make the troops prisoners——"

With a howl of rage Otway's man leaped at Willis. The latter held up his rifle with both hands to block the rush and quietly remonstrated:

"Nay, nay, man! Not now. Wait a bit till after I've found Cap'n Putnam and got my orders. Then if your blood ain't cooled down we'll see about it. But it would be a pity for anything to happen to you when his Majesty needs such rugged fellows so badly."

The regular stared at him foolishly, puzzled at his grave and commiserating manner. The pause allowed him fully to grasp the significance of the deer-skin shirt and the stout war-ax in Willis's belt, and to explore the deep, cool depths of the level gray eyes.

"Of course I'm a soldier first," he muttered, backing away. "You can wait."

And oblivious to the quiet smiles he resumed his seat on the town-house steps.

Willis remained standing. From the corner of his eye he had caught a flash of color and had turned his head. The deep tan on his lean face could not conceal the sudden rush of blood. He stared incredulously and muttered something under his breath.

The tall scout lighted his pipe and quickly discovered the cause of the ranger's perturbation. He grinned broadly and between puffs informed the other:

"That's 'Jan the Rogue's' gal. Reg'lar wildfire sort of a gal. Whole town's talking about her pranks in New York."

"Jan the Rogue's girl," softly repeated Willis.

"That's his Dutch nickname. Dutch is great for nicknames. He's old Lidindick, trader, and if the truth could be known a —— old smuggler. The Long House says he's sold powder 'n' balls to the French to be used against us on the Ohio. They'd like to cure his scalp.

"Funny, though, they all like his gal. She's been to school and is brought up English. Been living with her aunt in New York. Raised hob so that the old lady packed her home to her father.

"Officers down there went crazy over her. Officers up here is just the same. Provincial or reg'lar, it don't seem to make no difference when her petticoats show on the street."

THE girl was now abreast of the gaping group and moving with an ease that bespoke perfect health. She was a rainbow of vivacity in her green cloth petticoat and red and blue waistcoat with its yellow sleeves. The dainty purple "Pooyse" apron suggested to the ranger that she had not roamed far from her home.

When he saw her in New York she had been dressed far differently. Now she was typical of her father's people. She seemed able to shift from type to type with amazing faithfulness to detail, but whatever type she portrayed she was at her best.

He had been bewildered when in her presence in New York, when sheer luck had thrown him in the way of doing her a service and of being thanked by her. Luck again was bringing them together, and although he knew she was courted by officers of high rank his sturdy spirit would not accept that fact as a handicap to his better acquaintance with her.

As he marveled at the radiance of her face and the lithesome swing of her young form he knew he must see and talk with her if he would take a stout heart north in his task of outwitting Montcalm's hair-dressers. To his comrades' astonishment he trailed his long rifle and started diagonally across the broad street to join her.

She quickened her pace without glancing in his direction, and he grumbled—

"She has the speed of a wolf."

On gaining the sidewalk and the shelter of the shade-trees, however, she loitered and allowed him to come up to her.

"My unknown hero of New York," she lightly greeted him after one keen glance through the twilight.

"Ephraim Willis, of Connecticut, but just now from the Monongahela," he awkwardly rejoined, removing his heavy cap and revealing a mass of perspiring locks. "Now detailed as ranger under Cap'n Putnam."

"Very interesting, Ephraim Willis," she lisped. "And why do you follow me?"

"I guess you don't remember," he faltered. "We met in the Blue Swan tap-room in New York last March. You're Elizabeth Lidindick, and were visiting your aunt, Miss Patrick. I'm Ephraim Willis——"

"My hearing is excellent," she broke in. "Please don't tire yourself by saying it all over again. But when one meets a maid in a tap-room one shouldn't have the bad taste to remind her of it. I've been sent home in disgrace for that prank. Am I to pay penalty to you?"

"God forbid I should make you feel unhappy!" he cried. "I mentioned it so you might remember me by name. I followed you because I'm a fool. I have forest wit, but no town wit."

"You had rare wit or courage that night in the tap-room," she conceded. "But you don't take advantage of that to form my acquaintance?"

"I was fool enough to think you might like to speak to me," was the angry retort.

"When you remind me of my disgrace why should I want to speak to you?" she coldly demanded.

"That's plain enough for any one to understand, and I'll be about Cap'n Putnam's business. My head was made for that. I ought to have smirked and minced and acted like a dancing magpie when I come up to you."

In his anger and humiliation he would have left her most abruptly had she not shifted her mood and bent on him a glance that befuddled him and made his stout heart do absurd tricks.

"You were kind to me when I needed a friend," she cooed.

"At that particular time you seemed to be surrounded by friends," he muttered. "So friendly they didn't seem to want to lose you."

"They were all eager to serve me—for pay. You served me and left me. That was very pretty. I've thought of you as helping a maid and then going your way satisfied at having done a kindness."

Her frankness, her beauty and her marvelous animation overwhelmed him. He faltered like an overgrown boy. The coolness which had characterized his many encounters with the Shawnees was entirely wanting. In his very desperation his lips grew bold, and before he realized it he was declaring:

"I know of no service I've done you. I came after you because you're the most beautiful thing on earth. I couldn't help it."

"La, la! But you speak warm for a Connecticut man," she gasped, her blue eyes very wide. "You outstep a wild blade of an officer in bold speeches. Fie for shame, Ephraim Willis! And you posing for a simple, honest, God-fearing young man!"

Now he knew she was making game of him, but he could not retreat. The ice was broken and he doggedly held on.

"I can hide my trail from Shawnee or Mingo, but not from you, Elizabeth Lidindick. I must be honest with you."

"It's quite refreshing to find an honest man," she dryly remarked. "Yet most men who talk to me always say they are 'honest.' Why do you come up to this dreary hill and its dreary village?"

"I join Cap'n Putnam of the Rangers here."

She eyed him thoughtfully as if asking herself questions, then murmured:

"Albany is a queer place for forest rangers. Are the Indians about to attack the English here?"

He frowned at her gibe and gravely informed her—

"With Lord Loudoun placing his ten thousand men between here and the head of Lake George there's small chance for Montcalm's red devils to work any mischief here."

They had walked a few rods up the street and now she turned into a porch and seated herself on a settle and drew aside her petticoats in invitation for him to join her. She puzzled him exceedingly. She had greeted him as her "unknown hero," thus evidencing she remembered him and the service he had rendered her.

Almost in the same breath she had asked why he followed her; and almost before he had given his answer she had upbraided him for "bad taste," had rebuked him for seeking her favor, and then had melted and admitted her obligation. Cold and hot she blowed until he was rarely befuddled. Now she was smiling seraphically and urging him to sit with her.

"Of course this war is all a blind business to me," she was sweetly confessing as he gingerly took his place by her side. "England and France are at peace for a year with their armies fighting over here. Now they are at war and we keep on fighting.

"I wonder what it's all about. It seems to be a running back and forth with no one knowing what to do. The French will not come down the lake, and General Winslow will not go up the lake. Both might as well go home. One seems afraid and t'other dare not."

"You'll see who dares inside of thirty days," Willis assured her. "And I shall be in the thick of it."

Then ruefully—

"But when can I see you again?"

"Lor! What a bold young spark!" she mocked. "You see me now. You know it's very wrong for me to be sitting here with you. Mynheer Van Tassel's *vrouw* is watching us. Such stories she will tell Albany! If my father wasn't an invalid he might come out and order me into the house."

"But what harm in our talking? And I haven't said much, you know."

She laughed softly at this naive reminder, but was very grave as she said:

"I must be very watchful of my manners. I am sent home in disgrace."

"I know," he sighed. "This is harmless enough. But that—well, that *was* a prank. Rather a bold one."

"You are criticizing me?" she questioned.

"Good Lord, no! I'd never criticize anything that gave me the chance to know you," he hastily defended.

NOW she was all dimples and silent laughter again.

"Rather neatly turned, Ephraim Willis," she applauded.

"I jumped for the first bit of cover I could find," he returned.

Now her blue eyes were limpid with appeal and she coaxed—

"Tell me that what happened in New York didn't make you have a poor opinion of me."

"What a notion!" he gasped.

"I hope that means it didn't. And so now you're off to take Ticonderoga. Captain Putnam must think highly of you to meet you here and talk over plans."

"That ain't it. I bring a message to him. I am to look for him here at headquarters. If he doesn't show up I'm to press on and find him.

"I overheard things in New York. I've seen and heard things here. It's easy to read the trail. I know the backing and filling is ended and that all is ready to teach Montcalm his lasting lesson."

"They said that last year," she murmured, smothering a little yawn.

"This time they mean it. The plan can't fail. No more wasting men by leaving them here and at the posts along the road to Lake George. No advancing with half our force, but a smashing advance on water and land. I mustn't talk about it any more."

"You may be hurt—killed!" she shivered.

And his delight at her concern caused him to forget he had been indiscreet. One little hand touched his lightly and she was whispering:

"Oh, I do hope you advance in full force. The French are very strong, they say. You must be careful."

"As a ranger I go ahead," he proudly replied. "I know how to take care of myself. Johnson had the chance last year if he'd listened to Lyman and pressed on after licking Dieskau."

"And you've brought this news from New York to Captain Putnam!" she exclaimed admiringly.

He laughed quietly, much pleased with her lack of sophistication.

"Scarcely that. I was ordered to wait here two days, to press on if Cap'n Putnam didn't show up. I bring other messages, but not what the cap'n knows already. Where and when can I see you to-morrow?"

"The saints must protect the French if you storm them at Ticonderoga with the same spirit you would overrun a poor maid's heart," she cried. Then derisively:

"Now, Sirrah Woodsman, you make a big talk, as the Iroquois say, about army affairs. Confess you think to impress me with your importance. I'll think no worse of you for the shift.

"But you forgot that Albany folks know what's forward with Loudoun's men—and what's backward. Not a citizen on the hill who does not know that Loudoun and Montcalm are marking time. Even your General Winslow at Fort William Henry wrote Lord Loudoun that the 'sons of Belial are too strong for us.' An officer told me that. Neither side will make a move this year. Next year? Well, maybe. God knows."

"You think me a windy talker," growled Willis. "Cap'n Putnam comes here to get his orders for covering our advance. Major Rogers is scouting far north, or he would come in Putnam's place.

"Loudoun's staff officers questioned me yesterday. I was questioned in New York as one who knows the country up here. One does not need to be asked many questions before discovering what the questions mean."

"How wisely put!" she murmured, darting him a sidelong glance that set his heart to dancing. "Behold, I will be the brave ranger, Ephraim Willis. And you shall be the general staff and question me, and I will tell you what you mean."

With a tantalizing burlesque of Willis' grave bearing she braced her shoulders as if standing at attention and nodded for him to proceed.

His gray eyes advertised a rash resolution before he spoke. Placing a brown hand over her slim hands, he whispered:

"Do you love me? Can you tell what I mean by that question?"

She flung his hand aside and rose to her feet, haughtily saying:

"That is not the game we were playing, sir. They teach you queer manners in Connecticut along with their cant and psalm-singing. Or have you been living alone in the woods so long that you think the first white girl you meet is to be pawed about by a provincial lack-of-wit?"

Before he could recover from his bewilderment she raised the latch and swept into the house.

"Well, —— my blood!" he choked out, glaring in despair and rage at the closed door. "One would think I was a drunken wagoner!"

He sprang to seize the latch, but the heavy glass bull's eyes in the upper half of the door, dimly illuminated by the light back of them, stared him out of countenance; or, better, brought him to his senses. He quit the porch and hurried blindly down the street, his face burning under the sting of her contemptuous dismissal.

"Lack-of-wit, am I?" he bitterly muttered. "Yet I had wit enough to save her from her sorry pranks in New York. Aye, and when it meant earning the hate of Cap'n Lucie of the Grenadiers.

"And in God's mercy what game did she think I was playing, if not my game of making love to her? They called her 'Miss Wildfire' in New York. They call her Jan the Rogue's girl up here.

"Dressed in velvet coat and scarlet breeches, cocked hat and periwig, strutting it with sword and silken hose, she dared to visit the Blue Swan tap-room. Never was there such a gallant! No wonder Cap'n Lucie lost his head. Knowing the risk she ran, she dared all that.

"And if I hadn't come along with my long rifle— Now I, an honest ranger but touch her hand, but ask if she loves me, and ——'s luck! she gives me a dressing-down as if I had mixed blood in my veins. Life of my body, but I must be rare poison!"

HIS bitter meditations were interrupted by his violent collision with one who like himself was striding along with head bowed in deep thought. The impact of their meeting sent the two backward, and both jerked up their heads in anger. Despite the dusk Willis made out a thick-set, muscularly built man, and rubbing his nose he growled—

"If you're blind get somebody to lead you round."

"You impudent, godless, good-for-nothing woods runner! You dare to speak to Israel Putnam in that fashion?" roared the other.

"Bless my heart! Cap'n Putnam! Great saltpeter! If it ain't Wolf Putnam hisself!" apologetically gasped Willis.

"You're so cursedly free with your names, suppose you give your own, you blundering lout!" thundered Captain Putnam.

Then before Willis could add to his apology the captain thrust his head forward and exclaimed.

"That hatchet face! By the Lord Harry! If it isn't Connecticut breed I'll shape it over! I have it. You're a Willis, or may I have my hair trimmed by Montcalm's barbers!"

"Ephraim Willis, sent here from New York to report to you, cap'n," drawled Willis. "Hope I didn't hurt you."

"Hurt me, you good-for-not ing rascal. If I hadn't jumped back I'd have stepped on you and squat the life out of that lank body. You must be one of Daniel's boys, or Seth's——"

"Dan'l's," eagerly interrupted Willis, accepting the hand now stretched out to him and grinning broadl . "Lord, cap'n! If you smash the French as you hit me we'd go plumb through old Ti and into Montreal."

The lively good nature over meeting a neighbor's son vanished and left Putnam dour of visage. In a second the strong, animated countenance resumed the deeply troubled expression it had worn when the two walked into each other.

"Then you don't know the news?" he mumbled. "It just come. Oswego's captured by Montcalm."

"Good God!" whispered Willis, his thin face filled with dismay. "Oswego taken? Why, Montcalm's at Ticonderoga! Why—why—General Webb was marching there with reenforcements——"

"Montcalm played us a trick," groaned Putnam. "Left Levis in charge at Ticonderoga while he went against Oswego. General Webb heard the news at the Great Carrying-Place and turned back. Spoiled the road at Wood Creek by felling trees and filling the stream, burned our forts at the Carrying-Place and has now hustled down the Mohawk to German Flats."

"—— his liver for a cowardly rat!" moaned Willis.

"You're speaking of one of his Majesty's officers, sir!" thundered Putnam.

Then regretfully:

"If General Lyman had been in his shoes he'd kept up his hunt for the enemy. And he spoiled the road we worked so hard to make! Biggest victory the French have won."

"There was Braddock's defeat."

"That was a Indian victory. This is all French. They had painted devils from Two Mountains and way out beyond the big lakes, but it was a French victory."

"When did the news come?"

"An hour ago. Messenger from General Webb. Lord Loudoun sends orders to call off our advance on Ticonderoga. Seems to think the French will be piling down on us pellmell."

"But why can't we go out and meet 'em? Why not crowd on and capture old Ti before Montcalm gets back and gets set again?"

"You're criticizing your superiors, sir. Why the —— we don't go and get them is beyond me. But come, come! Over to the town-house and I'll explain the job ahead of us."

"Here in Albany?"

"Right here in Albany. Don't fret. I'll see you have a man's work in the bush mighty soon."

Willis' heart thrilled with delight. No matter how rudely the maid might use him he now believed he must see her and hear her voice once more.

"We're to round up a spy," continued Putnam. "I had them send you as you're a stranger here this season. There's a man in Albany who's been sending information to Vaudreuil. He shall swing for it.

"It's through this spy that Vaudreuil and Montcalm learned of General Webb's advance with reenforcements for Oswego. His work has lost us that fort, has given Lake Ontario to the French with free passage to and from the west, and now allows them to swing all their strength to hold the line at Ticonderoga. Locate that man so I can take him by surprize before he has a chance to destroy his papers, and he shall hang."

"And let me pull the rope. His name?"

"Never mind names. You're to make no inquiries. Find a house with red bull's-eyes. There is one such in Albany. The others are green or blue glass.

"One of our men, just escaped from Montreal, says Vaudreuil receives information regularly, and that he boasts that messages signed 'at the sign of the red bull's-eyes' counts more for France than half a dozen regiments."

"I'll find it before midnight. Do I drag the villain out?"

"No. Come to me at the town-house at once. I'm keeping under cover till he's located. His capture must be planned to prevent his

destroying the evidence that will hang him."

"I'll be off at once. And, cap'n, the capture of Oswego won't put an end to good bush-fighting round George and Champlain, I hope."

"A bellyful waiting for you, Ephraim Willis."

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE WITH RED EYES

DARTING from his captain, Willis commenced a methodical search of the town. The houses for the greater part were uniformly of Dutch design, the front door being divided. In the upper half of each door, or—and this less frequently—in the transom, were two bull's-eyes of thick green glass. These glowed softly when the candles were burning within.

His quest was for a house with red bull's-eyes. Where houses showed lights he could eliminate them at a glance; where houses were in darkness it was necessary for him to inspect closely, even to the extent of striking a spark with his steel and flint. Beginning at the river he worked rapidly. The tall, steep roofs suggested the sharp-pointed hats of the early New Englanders, and the glowing green eyes hinted at the sinister. While given to none of the superstitions which had caused the Salem furor of half a century back Willis could not help but think of witches as he glided along, soft-footed as a padded cat.

For an hour he searched, and then as he neared the top of the hill he glimpsed two spots of red pricking through the trees on the opposite side of the main street. He crossed over and halted behind a tree before the house. It was much like its neighbors except for the red glass in the upper half of the door.

Somewhere in the immediate neighborhood lived the daughter of Jan the Rogue. He leaned against the tree for a minute to meditate on the girl, whose charms were sufficient to push the disaster of Oswego to the back of his mind. It was a terrible thing when the French secured full control of Ontario and the west and were free to concentrate all their strength on the Lake George country....And the girl had flouted him most outrageously.

Only a few weeks before, fifty Canadians, painted like the red allies accompanying them, had audaciously shown themselves across the river opposite the town and had carried off two captives. What would not their boldness permit them to dare now that there was no water gate on Ontario to guard?....And she had led him on only to make game of him.... Elizabeth Lidindick....He sighed lugubriously. His personal troubles were outweighing those of the colonies.

He vowed to himself he would humble her pride. In the crucible of his hot thoughts he mixed anger with his hopeless devotion. He berated the girl under his breath and at the same time feared he loved her with all his soul.

The sound of a door closing brought him back to realities and the realization that he had no business to tarry. Some one had come through the spy's door. Had he been on the alert when the door stood open for a fraction of a moment and allowed the light to shine over the threshold he might have made a discovery. Now the door was closed and he could only make out a dark figure approaching down the walk.

Instead of coming to the street the figure turned aside and remained motionless on the little green. The watcher behind the tree caught a sound that suggested some one sighing in deep distress. With the stealth of an Iroquois he glided from the tree and on to the green and was startled to find himself an eavesdropper to a woman's sobbing.

This was a sorry plight for a man to find himself in. To take his luck in a running fight with a hundred painted warriors was a part of the game, but a woman in tears melted the heart out of him. Only by remembering the terrible blow to the colonies' fortunes through the fall of Oswego could he restrain himself from making his presence known and offering sympathy. He began to withdraw, but now the woman detected his presence, and with a startled little cry ran toward him a few steps and in a low voice demanded:

"Who are you standing there? I see you. Who are you?"

"May the —— cage me!" choked the ranger under his breath.

Aloud he managed to explain—

"Ephraim Willis, always at your service, Elizabeth Lidindick."

"The Connecticut lad!" she softly whispered, gliding to his side and running her fingers over the fringed seams of his hunting-shirt to make sure of his identity. "Ephraim Willis, who was kind to me, whom I used badly. Oh, lad, lad! Why should I act perverse with you, an honest man! God forgive me! I am a sad case."

"You seem to be in trouble," faltered Willis, still tingling from the swift touch of her light fingers.

"In deep trouble," she murmured. "Sad truth. In deep trouble."

"If I can help you——"

"You can not. My father is dying."

"Dying? I will go for aid."

"No, no. Nothing can help him. It's heart malady. He has known it would take him some day. The hour has struck. We have not been as close as some fathers and daughters; still he is my father. I find I shall need him and miss him."

"Who stays with him while you are out here?"

He reddened with shame at thus spying upon the unhappy household, but he was remembering Putnam's business.

"There is no one with us. He sent me out. He wished to be alone for a spell."

"Then may the good Lord forgive, but I fear I must bring you more trouble," groaned the ranger. "I'm sent to find a house with red bull's-eyes. I never dreamed it was your house until you spoke to me."

"Sent to find? Sent by whom?" she whispered.

"Cap'n Putnam."

"And finding us—what then?"

"He must be told. I must report to him at once."

"He—they—suspect my father of something?"

"Cap'n Putnam wishes to talk with him. I'd rather roast at the stake than fetch such news to you."

"It is nothing. My father is dying. That only counts. Your Captain Putnam can harm him none."

"Of course not. When this is all over you'll let me see you?"

"Where do you go now?"

"To report to Cap'n Putnam."

"What? Your report can not even wait for a man to die?"

"You don't understand. A woman can't. A man would. Your father would."

"You would bring your captain tramping up to a death-bed?"

"My part is done when I report that this is the house. Doubtless Cap'n Putnam will wait—may not come—when he knows how it is. Yet I have no right to speak for him. It's a bad business. Afterwards some time——"

"There will be no 'afterwards'," she broke in. "There will be no 'sometimes'. If you bring any one to disturb my father you will never see me again with my permission. You say you are my friend, and you ask me to help you spy on me and on a dying man."

"Good Heavens! I spy on *you*? I spy on no one. I run an errand. If Cap'n Putnam comes here——"

"He will find a dead man," she sobbed, turning back to the door. "And I hope I shall never see you again."

As she opened the door she stood revealed for a moment. She was wearing a long black cloak that enveloped her from head to toe.

Willis braced himself to do his duty and made for the town-house. Excited groups of citizens and soldiers surged back and forth about the hall. Messengers arrived and departed. All sorts of rumors filled the ear.

"Montcalm's coming by the way of the Great Carrying-Place and the Mohawk," babbled a citizen.

"General Webb's retreating from German Flats with two thousand Indians at his heels," cried another.

"——'s loose for Albany if we don't stop de Levis," bawled a drunken soldier. "He's coming from old Ti to pinch off everything north of Albany."

"Guess all the Western Indians is coming down the big lakes by this time."

But most sinister of all forebodings was the whispered word that the Long House, only apathetic in espousing the cause of the colonies, was now painting for war and would join with the Canadian Indians in driving the English from the country.

THROUGH this mélange of depressing rumors Willis moodily elbowed his way, his thought focused on the girl and the dying man.

Putnam saw his tall form in the crowd and buffeted a path to his side, his eyes demanding the report.

"I've found it," Willis quietly informed Putnam.

As the two passed beyond the jabbering crowd the ranger continued:

"A man is dying there. Jan Lidindick. Jan the Rogue, the Dutch call him."

"Trader and smuggler. Sorry he's dying. We planned to hang him. Who's with him?"

"His daughter Elizabeth. She came here from New York."

"The girl Elizabeth!" exclaimed Captain Putnam. "Why, the wench dressed as a man and visited tap-rooms and tea-houses in New York. Spent twenty pounds at the Blue Swan one night. Captain Lucie made a fool of himself and was reprimanded. He was heard to tell her things that never should have been intrusted to his feeble mind. 'Tis the same!"

"Same what?" feebly asked Willis, his blood congealing as the dynamic man at his side increased his stride.

"The same spy who milked young Lucie about Webb's plans to reinforce Oswego. She, or her father, sent the news through to Vaudreuil in Montreal. It's all as plain as my nose. Well! That leak will be stopped."

"But, Cap'n Putnam, this girl Elizabeth—" spluttered Willis.

"Yes, yes; this girl Elizabeth, whose mother was French, whose father was a smuggler before he turned spy. Yes? What about her?"

"She can't be a spy," groaned Willis. "Just a wild little thing, but there's no hurt in her."

"So that's the way the wind blows," muttered Putnam. "You've met her and she's made a fool of you. Thank —— you didn't have a budget of news to tell."

"She's no spy," hoarsely persisted Willis.

"She's no 'wild little thing'," retorted Putnam. "Her wearing breeches in New York

was part and parcel of her father's game for her to get information. Old lady Patrick, her aunt, was also in the game. Sent home in disgrace? Sent home to find more fools up here. Now, lad, what did you tell her?"

Willis drew a deep breath and doggedly repeated:

"She's no spy. I let on we would move on Ticonderoga in force. She never asked for any information. I gave it. But she's no spy."

"If so certain, why so worried?"grimly demanded Putnam. "Now, look you; you've talked. You've blabbed. Even if you are Daniel Willis' boy you're not the man I want to help me, if that hussy has milked you as she did Lucie."

"We'll never move against Ticonderoga in force now Oswego's falling. Whatever I said can help the French none, not even if it was shouted from all the roofs in Montreal. But she's no spy."

They were now before the red bull's-eyes. Without a word Putnam ran to the door and raised the latch. Willis halted at the threshold as if wishing to run away. The light from the open door cut the walk under the shade-trees and afforded the ranger a glimpse of a forest runner in fringed shirt making by the house and down the hill.

"Ahead of me, sir," sternly ordered Putnam, catching Willis by the wrist and shoving him through the door. "A colored petticoat can raise more deviltry in his Majesty's forces than all the French praying Indians that Vaudreuil can ever let loose. Through the house, and see she does not get away."

Search as closely as they would they could find no trace of the girl, and it was not until they entered the garret that they came to Jan the Rogue. He was dead, with his arms crossed on his breast, his long figure covered with the flag of France.

Putnam made to snatch the flag away, then withdrew his hand, mumbling:

"Well, why not? He served it at the risk of his neck. Let it cover him dead if he wishes it. No English flag can serve him."

Turning to Willis, he sharply cried:

"The girl, man! If she gets word to Vaudreuil that Albany is panic-stricken we'll have the French down on us in no time. And this border is ripe for a panic."

"We've searched everywhere."

"Except the loft and cock-loft. Up we go!"

They ransacked the loft, even opening the ponderous Dutch chests. Willis breathed in great relief as they failed to find any trace of her. Ascending to the cock-loft, a glance was sufficient. But here Willis noticed a green cloth petticoat and the gaudy waistcoat on a stool. These were the same as those she had worn in the afternoon.

"She's not in the house," Willis whispered.

"Worse luck. Down-stairs and scurry the streets while I call a guard. Albany must be sealed up till she's found."

"Hush," begged Willis. "The poor girl went to call in the neighbors. I can hear them below."

The two rangers hurriedly descended and found a little group of men and women standing just inside the door.

"Elizabeth Lidindick sent word that her father was dead and would we come. We are here," spoke up a man. "Where is the girl? Is Jan the—Is Mynheer Lidindick—really dead?"

"He awaits you up-stairs—dead," replied Putnam. "The girl is not here. Did she come to you?"

The man repeated—

"She sent word."

Pointing to Willis, he added:

"I thought it was that man who came. Now I see it was not. He was a ranger and only called at the door. He only said Elizabeth Lidindick wished us to come as her father was dead. He was not dressed like our rangers, but like that man."

And he nodded again toward Willis.

Putnam ran from the house with Willis at his heels.

"A fine kettle of fish!" cried the exasperated Putnam. "Now who in the fiend's name can this strange ranger be?"

Willis gave a little cry and stood as if petrified, staring down at the black blotch on the grass at his feet. The light streaming through the open door made the thing very obvious. Putnam snatched it up and shook it out—a long black cloak.

Willis knew it to be the same as that which the girl had worn when he surprized her in the dark. She had worn it into the house; now she had worn it out and had discarded it. Why? Because without it she hoped he would not recognize her.

Then she must have passed near him; she must have been quitting the premises when he and Captain Putnam came up the walk. He remembered the slim figure of the forest ranger. the fringed hunting-shirt and the fur cap.

"We must save her," he told Putnam in a trembling voice.

"Save her?" snapped Putnam.

"It was she who asked the neighbors here. When we entered the house I saw her passing. I thought she was a ranger. She must have stood behind a tree when we came up. She knew I would know her in the cloak and she threw it aside. Now she is gone and we must find her before she wanders into the Indian country."

"Find her we will—to save the colonies. To save her? Why, you scatter-brain, the girl

is more at home in the forest than she was in the tap-rooms. She is not the first Albany woman to go unafraid among the heathens. More than once a *vrouw* has gone to the Iroquois to barter and drive sharp bargains. They have a knack of picking up the lingo, too.

"This girl had the ranger's dress for a purpose, just as she wore breeches in New York for a purpose. She turns ranger to get more information across the line.

"Scout the outskirts while I call some men. She is out of the town by this time and we must take her trail at once. Meet me on the road to Van Woert's farm."

"But so young! So helpless! God help us find her and protect her," prayed Willis.

"Amen," heartily cried Putnam. "My temper was to put you under arrest for a babbling fool. But now I think you'll be very valuable; very keen to catch the lass. Fear nothing as to her getting lost. She's played ranger before. I'm afraid she knows the way to Montreal better than we do."

IN A frenzy of alternating hope and fear Willis made for the foot of the hill, pursuing footsteps through the darkness, abruptly halting various dim figures and with muttered excuse speeding away again. He prayed he might find her, and yet he was afraid to do so.

Did he balk her tonight she would never think of him again except with hatred. But if he did not stop her flight this night she might become a captive to Johnson's Mohawks, who still smarted for revenge over the death of old Hendrick and other chiefs.

Or worse, she might wander into the clutches of the ferocious Western savages, who would tear off her fair hair and learn afterward that she was an ally to their great, good master Marquis de Vaudreuil. For Willis did not share Putnam's belief that the girl was safe among the red men.

"Failed, of course," was Putnam's greetings as he led a squad of rangers along the river road and came upon Willis. "You're to stick with me. These are to scout up the Mohawk. She's either making up the Mohawk, intending to cut through over the mountains to the Richelieu, or else she is striking direct for Ticonderoga. Not suspecting we know she is playing at being a ranger, she is likely to take the military road until near Fort William Henry. Then she'll round the lake on foot, or steal a canoe and make it at night."

"It's a horrible thing she is doing—if she is a spy. But God help me, I love her!" moaned Willis.

"You're a big calf," growled Putnam; and yet his voice was not overharsh. "As for the merits of the vixen's case perhaps we're too prejudiced to judge. Her mother was French; her father had no love for the English. But if Lidindick sent the information that led to the capture of Oswego he canceled lots of old scores."

"Oswego! Does it mean ruin to the colonies?"

"Ruin us? Nothing can ruin us except we ruin ourselves. But it gives the French both ends of the rope and a cursedly strong grip on the middle. But you and this girl—I don't know about having a love-sick ranger with me. Especially when it's his sweetheart we follow."

"I'm fool, a calf, as you said," was the dismal rejoinder. "She has no thought for me except to laugh at me. As to following her, there isn't any one so keen to stop her mad errand."

"That will hardly do," mused Putnam. "I've been thinking. The minx will carry some news unless she's locked up. I guess we're best off to have her carry some false news.

"She goes to tell Vaudreuil that Lord Loudoun will attack Ticonderoga in force. A few hours ago I would have stopped her at all cost. But now with Loudoun sitting tight, determined to make no move, it's for the best that she gets through. The French will at least think we're about to attack, and that may spare us an attack in force from them.

"Yes, we'll follow her. We'll see she takes her budget through. So far as we're concerned the campaign is ended for this year. Best to have Montcalm marking time."

"I can't bear to think of her going to Montreal," protested Willis.

"Either that, or under lock and key. Small love she'll grow for you if she's locked up. This is the time she must run the lines. Another time and it might mean another Oswego. Now best foot forward. We may learn something at Van Woert's farm."

CHAPTER III

THE MESSENGER WHO FAILED.

PUTNAM'S small band of rangers ascended the Mohawk with instructions to turn north after passing Schenectady. The captain and Willis held on through Stillwater, Saratoga and Upper Falls without finding a trace of the girl.

"I've either guessed wrong or the girl is good enough ranger to serve with Rogers," fumed Putnam as inquiry after inquiry failed to bring them any information.

"She must have gone up the Mohawk," sighed Willis.

"Then my men will find her trail and keep tabs on her. But reason tells me she must have come the most direct way. She didn't know she was suspected and would be trailed. She would try to run the lines before the forts

and outposts could be warned to head her off. If she went up the Mohawk I'm disappointed in her. But if she come this way may the —— find her."

Ahead of them was Fort Edward, so christened by William Johnson in honor of the King's grandson, although the New England provincials were better pleased with the original name of Lyman, the fighting Connecticut general. If they got no trace of the girl here they must trust entirely to luck as the lake with its thick forests was but fourteen miles away.

Once the girl got into the brush she could reach Ticonderoga by following either side of the lake or by stealing a canoe and traveling at night. Only the chance meeting with some of Rogers' rangers could stop her.

Putnam still insisted he wished the girl to get through the lines with her news that the English were to advance in force, but he was just as insistent on being at her heels so as to know when she entered the fort. Willis' fears that harm had befallen her were scoffed at by Putnam; yet the captain knew he would feel better once he learned she was clear of the bush. Spy she might be, yet she was a white woman, and should be kept from the Indians. As the two men approached the fort Putnam exlaimed:

"There is General Lyman! But what's the matter with him? I've know Phineas long enough to tell when he's upset. See how he swing his fists as he walks back and forth! Must be taking the Oswego matter mighty hard. You can hold back a minute."

As he approached the agitated general, Putnam was cordially greeted, Lyman's face lighting up as he gazed into the strong, open countenance of the ranger. Putnam from the beginning, when he had enlisted as a private, had made good. He bore a conspicuous part in the "bloody morning scout" and the defeat of Dieskau. Like Lyman he had urged pursuit of the baron's shattered forces. At bush-fighting he had proven himself such an adept as to attract the attention of Rogers, who, no matter what weaknesses he was guilty of as a man, was invaluable to the colonies as leader of the rangers.

"Bad business, general," said Putnam.

"Bad because it's so foolish. Now they'll blame Shirley, and he at least tried to make Oswego stout and to capture Niagara and Frontenac."

"The damage should be repaired by a stout stroke," declared Putnam, speaking with the freedom of a neighbor.

"That's what we're up here for," was the terse rejoinder.

Then angrily:

"But —— me! I've lost another sentinel. The fourth to disappear within as many days."

Putnam's eyes widened; so it was the loss of a sentinel rather than the calamity of Oswego that was disturbing the general.

Lyman read his thoughts and growled:

"Oswego isn't my affair yet. The missing sentinel is. It was at the small outpost below us, and it puts my wig in buckle. It makes a man's nerves cut up all sorts of capers."

"The fourth to disappear. Not shot with an arrow as they do it at Fort William Henry, but disappears?"

"Just that. That's what riles me. When the first was reported missing, with neither hair nor hide of him to be found, I put him down as a deserter. The next morning the second vanished—and some blood was found. The mystery of it fretted the men. None was keen to stand guard that night.

"Number three goes into the air. More blood, but no sound of a struggle, no call for help. Now they report the fourth man has gone. I've given orders for the sentinels to always call out three times 'Who goes there?' at the least sound and then fire. Not one of the four men has fired his gun.

"The men have volunteered for the duty, but now the leftenant reports it'll be necessary to draft a man for each night, as no more are volunteering. It's bad for the men. They don't mind fighting against big odds but this business takes away their courage."

"Any other news?"

"A vast deal of it. Every party brings in an abundance, but it's all different," dryly replied the general. "But I'm glad you're back, Israel. That reminds me. A slip of a ranger, little more'n a boy, sought you here last night. Name, Ephraim Willis. Said he just come from New York to join your company.

"I only got half a glimpse at him as I was fussed up over the Oswego affair. Nothing more'n a boy, and too good-looking at that. They must teach 'em young on the Pennsylvania frontier. Told me he was with Braddock on the Monongahela. I'd intended to talk with him this morning, but he too had vanished when I got round to it. Probably on his way back to Albany to meet you."

Captain Putnam's face had been very grave as he listened; now his eyes twinkled, and he motioned for his companion to advance.

"General Lyman," he said, "let me call your attention to a son of Daniel Willis, of Connecticut. This is Ephraim Willis, who came from New York to serve under me. He was with Braddock, serving with Colonel Washington's Virginians."

"Devils for fiddlers!" exploded the general. "I've no time nor notion for foolishness, captain."

"The Ephraim Willis of last night is the daughter of Jan Lidindick, on her way with information to Vaudreuil."

General Lyman grew apoplctic of countenance.

"—— and fury!" he gasped. "Jan the Rogue's wench! And slipped right through my hands! And goes to report her discoveries at Ticonderoga! By Heavens, she shall be overhauled! I'll give orders to my men! ——! I forgot. My men are no good in the woods. Putnam, you must——"

"Just a word, general," begged Putnam. "It is best she goes through. She knows nothing of our orders to hold back an advance on Ticonderoga. She will tell Montcalm or Levis that we plan to attack in force. The news will halt the French till we can get our feet braced."

"It's best she be caught! Better she be hung than that she reach Ticonderoga," roared Lyman. "She talked but little with me, but taking her for your man I told my officers there would be no move against Ticonderoga, and she heard me. And the ——'s to pay if she gets through with *that* budget."

"That's a hoss of different color," slowly admitted Putnam. "No; she mustn't get through. She can't be far ahead. She doesn't know she's chased. She'll keep to the bush and move slowly to dodge the troops. Willis and I will cut her off."

It was not until they were back in the Lake George road that Willis found his voice.

"Think of it! She passed herself off as me," were his first words.

"And keen enough not to go to Lyman till candle-light," sighed Putnam. "You know the country from here to Fort William Henry?"

"As well as the road by my father's farm."

"Then take to the bush on the west side of it and I'll scout to the east. We'll meet before sundown at old Fort Anne at the tail of Shone Creek. If you find her, take her to Fort Edward and send a messenger to me. Tell General Lyman I ordered you to take her back to Albany. And if you love her don't let her slip through your fingers."

"She must be found, but I hope it's you who finds her," said Willis as he slipped into the forest.

BOTH were moving parallel to the road chopped out the year before by Johnson's axmen; and although many heavy wagons, many troops and the ordnance had passed over it the stumps of trees remained. It was only a raw gash through the primeval woods. Putnam first traveled it as a private, and had seen the genial Johnson leisurely pausing to drink his "fresh lemon punch" and wine, supplemented by "broken bread and cheese."

Seth Pomeroy, a gunsmith of Northampton, had been his companion during that trying campaign, also John Stark, who was to make the name of Bennington one to be remembered. Among the officers had been Ephraim Williams, a Massachusetts colonel, who had felt a premonition of evil while in Albany and who had drawn the will which laid the foundation of Williams College.

And the rustics of 1755 were now veterans. Pomeroy, Stark and many others of their kind were serving, like Putnam, in Major Robert Rogers' independent command of rangers.

As Putnam scouted the thick forest, ever casting about for some trace of the girl, he wished the country were more open, such as the West was said to be. Then there would be no ghastly tragedies of troops lost and bewildered in the somber woods, but a rattling, smashing campaign in God's sunlight, a mode of attack the Indians were chary to resist.

The Canadians and Indians were of scant value in the open, just as the regulars and provincials got in each other's way and allowed themselves to be massacred like so many sheep once the interlacing boughs shut out the light of the high heavens.

Sagacious in thought as he was reckless and daring in warfare, the Connecticut captain realized that the great danger from the fall of Oswego was not so much the loss of the fort itself as its effect upon the Long House. Sir William Johnson was working night and day to hold the Iroquois neutral where they refused to fight for the English. The French must be whipped if the Iroquois were to continue at peace with the English.

He was measurably sure of his Mohawks, who guarded the eastern door, but the keepers of the western door, the Senecas, were independent and irritable under any dictation. Whoever won this war won the Iroquois. The nation that had the Long House behind it could dominate the continent.

For many, many years the Iroquois controlled the region from Albany to Lake Erie. Without the consent of the Five Nations travel on the upper Hudson, the Mohawk, the Delaware and upper Susquehanna was at the risk of life. The governors of Maryland and Pennsylvania, as well as of Virginia and New York, journeyed through the wilderness to treat with the Long House when lesser nations would have been commanded to come to them.

One hundred and forty-six years before Israel Putnam enlisted in this war, one Samuel Champlain had highly delighted his wild Huron companions, and probably satisfied his own sporting propensity, by trying his firearms on a band of Iroquois, killing six. This was the first introduction of the Long House to the "bang-sticks," and they never forgave the French for taking this advantage of them. Their resentment became a racial memory.

In the ordinary course of events they would have turned to the French rather than to the English. The French were never brusk

with them. The French would live with them, marry their women, adopt their customs and be generous with presents. French goods were not as satisfactory as the Dutch and English wares, but French brandy was strong and French manners much more to the Indian's liking than the treatment received at the hands of the Anglo-Saxons.

But the marksmanship of the first Frenchman left a lasting impress upon them; and although at times priest and adventurers gained a transient influence over certain sections of the League there was but little lessening of the heritage of hate handed down from generation to generation. Verily Champlain's little hunting-venture was most costly to France!

Did the Iroquois join the French as allies, then France would hold Canada and control the continent. Now after a century and a half the terrible handicap of Champlain's indiscretion might be lifted. The Long House had no heart to war against Canada so long as many of their converted brothers fought for the lilies of Louis the Fifteenth.

The League's relations with the colonies were never based on affection. The League in its relations with England held itself to be at the least on an equal plane with the colonies, and England admitted this status by treating direct with the Five Nations.

The boundary disputes between the colonies, especially those of New York, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Virginia, and their continual jealousies and refusals to cooperate pleased the Long House immensely. Out of so much bickering and confusion the Indian's influence held strong, his pressure always mandatory; and for decades the colonists traveled up and down the hundred and fifty mile wide strip of seaboard before daring to cross the Alleghanies in numbers.

Putnam was one to turn subjects over in his shrewd mind and view them from all angles. It made his heart ache to know what a muddle the colonies had made of the war. He groaned and exclaimed vehemently under his breath as he recalled how Johnson had allowed Dieskau's shattered force to escape to Ticonderoga when they could have been cut off at South Bay.

IT WAS late in the afternoon when Putnam came to the tangled clearing which surrounded old Fort Anne. Bushes had sprung up about the ruins of the abandoned post, through which ran narrow game-trails and Indian paths. He kept within the cover of the forest until north of the fort, looking for signs of Willis or the girl. Deciding that he was ahead of Willis, he was seating himself to await the young ranger's coming when his keen eye glimpsed a brown patch through the bushes near the eastern edge of the woods. It might have been a bear, or some other animal, but instinct warned Putnam it was an Indian and a hostile one.

Stooping low, he struck into a winding path and soon reached the spot where he had detected the movement. Passing into the strong timber, he had no difficulty in locating the trail.

The occasional imprint of a moccasin in the forest mold suggested haste on the part of the Indian, as if he had observed the white man and wished to withdraw without being discovered. A friendly Indian would be scouting north of William Henry and not back here on the road to Fort Edward.

Putnam followed the trail along the east and northern borders of the clearing and soon concluded that the man had discovered he was being pursued. He was now taking pains to hide his trail, and only one equal in woodcraft to an aborigine could have followed it to and across Shone Creek, holding due west.

Suddenly Putnam dropped flat in the mire and heard a ball whistle over him. Rolling to one side, he came up behind a tree and for a moment beheld a furtive form flitting among the shadows of the deep woods. Putnam gave chase and fairly glimpsed the fugitive as he passed through a shaft of sunlight.

"French Mohawk or I'll eat my gun," he told himself, throwing forward his smooth-bore but unable to draw a bead on the dancing figure.

Increasing his pace, he covered only a few rods when he was halted again, this time by an arrow whipping by his face and quivering in a pine.

"Ambush!" he exclaimed, taking a head dive for cover behind a log.

A glistening brown body showed itself at the side of a huge pitch-pine, and the smooth-bore belched out a handful of buckshot.

"He won't yank no more Christian hair," growled Putnam, working in a half-circle to the body. "Didn't have time to reload, and planned to send me to Kingdom Come with his arrows."

He was much astonished on reaching the dead warrior to fail to find a gun or any accouterments which went with firearms.

"So there was two of them!" he exclaimed, slipping behind a tree.

Cautiously peering forth, he surveyed the prostrate form. The buffalo-horns worn for a headdress was positive proof of the dead brave's country.

"Western Indian. T'other one was a Mohawk."

Two guns sullenly boomed in the west, speaking almost together, the woods muffling the sound. Putnam eagerly streaked through the darkening growth, straining his ears and fearing to hear the scalp-yell of a French Mohawk. The tomb-like quiet of the forest continued. If one of the combatants was Willis

it would require a most cunning savage to get any advantage of him.

"That is, when he's himself. But his fool notions may have upset him so that he's lost his ears and eyes," Putnam muttered.

A gun clicked and Putnam vanished.

"That you, cap'n?" Softly called a voice.

"Maybe. Who the —— are you? Show yourself," returned Putnam.

"I know it's you, cap'n," was the reply; and the figure of Willis rose from the ground, holding his long Kentucky rifle in one hand and a fresh scalp in the other.

"Lad, you fooled me," admiringly admitted Putnam. "Thought sure you was two rods to the right and behind the bushes. I won't worry about you any more."

"One of Montcalm's Mohawks," murmured Willis. "French ax in his belt. Painted and all fussed up with feathers and oil. I've hid the gun where we can get it again."

"You're sure he ain't one of our Mohawks?" anxiously asked Putnam.

"Sure. French ax tells that. He shot at me first. Oh, I know the keepers of the eastern door. But take a look and satisfy yourself."

"You found no trace of her?" asked Putnam.

"Nary a sign," sighed Willis. "And I scouted closer'n I ever did before. But take a look at the blood-thirsty beast and we'll look for her farther.

"We almost met head on. I let him shoot first, because I hankered for cover. I jumped and he fired a second too late. Made a hole in my hat. I shot him without lifting my rifle from the hip. Drilled him right between the eyes. Mighty pretty shot. Here he is."

Putnam gave a look and nodded his head.

"Yes, he's one of Montcalm's praying Indians. His leather belt is French as well as his ax. No Indian ever made that belt and the wallet hitched to it."

"You came along before I'd time to peek into the wallet. Probably holds his paints," said Willis as he kneeled and opened the leather pouch. "Well, if that don't chase the devil round a stump!" he exclaimed, holding up a strip of birch-bark. "Some one writ on it with a charred stick."

Putnam snatched it studied it with puckered brows for a few moments, then disgustedly confessed—

"Can't make head nor tail out of it."

"It's French. Let me try my eye on it," said Willis.

He ran his eyes over it several times, his lips moving silently. Then his face went gray with pain and fear. Turning to Putnam, he muttered:

"I don't understand. It can't be she wrote it!"

"Read it," ordered Putnam.

"It can't be she done it," groaned Willis. "It goes like this:

"'M. de Vaudreuil or M. de Montcalm. The English fear much—or much afraid. They will not attack Ticonderoga. A swift stroke now will give you a great victory.

"'At the Sign of the Red Bull's-Eyes.'"

"She did write it!" muttered Putnam, rubbing his strong chin. "This Mohawk was her messenger. She made good use of her little visit to General Lyman. But where did she meet this dead Indian? I flushed him east of Fort Anne.

"Did he meet her farther east? If so why was he coming round the foot of the lakes? If she be east of the lake why doesn't she take her own message to Ticonderoga?"

"She was afraid of being caught. She was doubling her chances of getting word through," said Willis, and he heaved a love-sick sigh.

This did not satisfy Putnam, who shook his head and scowled in deep meditation. Then without lifting his head he slowly informed the other:

"She's south of Lake George. She doesn't want to go to Ticonderoga. She figures she's of more value to the French down here. She plans to pick up information and send it in. She doesn't know we've been to Fort Edward. It's like her impudence to go back there to get more news from General Lyman. We'll camp here. To-morrow you will scout to the lake and call at Fort William Henry and see if she has been there. If so, follow her. If you find no trace return to old Fort Anne. I'll go back to Fort Edward. She's either hiding between here and the fort, or else she's inside of Ticonderoga."

CAPTAIN PUTNAM arrived at Fort Edward three hours after sunrise, having failed to find any signs of the girl on the way. He at once sought General Lyman and found him pacing back and forth behind the fort, scowling fiercely, his fists clenched and arms swinging.

As Putnam halted and waited to be addressed Lyman groaned—

"Make's the fifth."

"Another sentinel, sir?" spoke up Putnam.

"Glad to see you, Israel. Yes; makes the fifth. Poor fellow was killed during the night. His body was picked up some distance back in the woods. Scalped. Only body that we've found."

"No alarm given?"

"Not a sound. His gun was found loaded just below the stockade. Just as if something reached down from the sky and snatched him up. Men are in a panic. And they're brave men, too.

"I haven't the heart to draft a man for to-night, yet it must be done. However, I can throw a string of troops round the post."

"General Lyman, let me volunteer. Let me

act as sentinel tonight," eagerly said Putnam.

"Major Rogers wouldn't thank me if I let you, one of his best captains, be killed while standing sentry duty at an outpost," slowly reminded Lyman.

"This is Indian work. It's work for one of Rogers'* rangers. Major Rogers would approve; and he never sends men where he wouldn't readily go," insisted Putnam.

Lyman paced back and forth a few times. Then he said:

"The killings must be stopped, else the outpost must be abandoned. Not only are we losing our men but we're poisoning their minds with a terrible fear of the red devils. If we quit the post the Long House will know about it and laugh at us and call us women, same as they laughed at us for burning our fort at Saratoga."

"It will never do to quit the post," insisted Putnam firmly. "If we can't stop a handful of redskins murdering our men down here at Fort Edward we might as well quit the lakes and go back to our farms and wait to be attacked there."

"All right. You shall stand guard, but you do so on your own responsibility. I'll draft another man, so there won't be any questions about you being asked to do post duty."

"Figuring I may get killed," laughed Putnam. Then very earnestly:

"General Lyman, I ask you to reconsider. There is but one Indian in these night attacks. If there was more the whole post would be destroyed. I want to match my wits against his. If you draft one of your men he will be in my way and my chances of catching the fellow will be greatly reduced. Let me go on alone and if he shows up you shall have his pelt this time tomorrow morning, or may you never enjoy another noggin of rum."

Lyman studied the determined face, and smiled as he dwelt on the fighting jaw and the indomitable eyes. This was the Putnam who had crawled into the wolf's den and had killed the marauder and won the name of Wolf Putnam.

"Israel, I guess you'll do it if any one can. Go ahead, and go it alone," surrendered the general. "My poor fellows have waited for the —— red to come to them. I know you'll get him if it's possible. And now it's settled I feel a heap easier in my mind. What are your plans?"

"I haven't any, except to go on guard and keep my ears open. Your men are all right, but their hearing isn't up to catching Indians. I'll match my ears against any Potawatomi, Lorette Huron, St. Francis Abnaki, or Caughnawaga Iroquois. May my scalp pay if I don't bag our visitor. Now I'll scout down to the outpost and look about a bit."

An hour later he was waiting upon the lieutenant commanding the small post and explaining his purpose. Leaving the officer greatly relieved in mind, he entered the forest and commenced an examination of the surrounding terrain.

The woods were gloomy for lack of sunshine. The floor was moist and oozed water at almost every step. Putnam followed the slope of land until he came to a sluggish creek, whose waters were black.

Starting at a point due north of the post, he followed the creek westward until he came to a trail. At first sight one might have pronounced it the track of a bear, so large was the imprint.

Putnam studied it sharply, and knew that a human foot, unshod, had left the sign. He moved back from the creek until he found two impressions a stride apart. And such a stride!

"A mighty big Indian," he mused. "He had to be to carry away in his arms the men he killed. Now for the saddest part of it. Poor lads! poor lads!"

And he retraced his steps to the creek and without any hesitation kneeled where the surface soil had broken from the bank and left exposed a mass of rotting roots. For nearly a minute he stared down into the inky waters; then, lying flat, he thrust down an arm, and his hand grasped an arm, and he knew where the nocturnal visitor had concealed his victims.

"If I don't have his hair before cock-crow it'll be because he don't show up," he gritted between his teeth.

CHAPTER IV

THE MEDICINE OF THE POTAWATOMI

THE night was oppressively warm, and the darkness sagged like a black tent over the little clearing. Back in the woods rose the sound of some occasional four-legged prowler, while the mournful interrogation of an owl caused the men of the garrison to cease their smoking and stare at the black wall and ask themselves who the next victim would be.

The witchcraft delusion was threescore years behind them, but fragments of superstitions still remained, and the influence of the dark woods, stretching across the Iroquois land and hiding many mysteries, was strong upon many a pioneer. Some of the men whispered how the sentinels had been killed by supposedly friendly Indians, men of the Iroquois, who had taken them away to use as sacrifices in awful rites. Others ominously insisted that the secret slayer would never be caught, intimating it was something more than flesh and bone.

Had Putnam realized the grotesque conjectures of the men he would have told them, as he

already had informed the lieutenant, of finding the bodies in the creek. He had withheld the information at the request of the lieutenant, who feared the news would seriously affect the spirits of the men.

So while the men smoked and whispered and at last turned in with their guns by their sides Putnam on sentinel duty leaned on his smoothbore and cocked his ear to test the weird *hoo, hoo-hoo* of the owl. He accepted the night call as genuine and relaxed. He did not anticipate any visit from the mysterious slayer until the post was asleep; and his thoughts ran backward rather than to the menace he hoped would soon assail him.

It was a little more than twelve months back that Sir William Johnson—plain William then—had been named to command the expedition against Ticonderoga and Crown Point. His selection by Governor Shirley of Massachusetts was intended to avoid the controversies sure to rise were a New England man named. From a political standpoint the choice was most wise as it aroused no New England jealousies, while it soothed the pride of New York and was extremely pleasing to the Long House.

Shirley's commission made Johnson major-general of the Massachusetts forces. The other provinces issued similar commissions; and although he knew nothing of warfare he took the field with a fine feeling of optimism. Then had followed his council with the leading men of the Iroquois, when he threw down the war-belt on the fourth day and an Oneida had picked it up.

The delays in preparing the roads to Lake George and in moving the army made Putnam grit his teeth in remembering, and had impelled the founder of Williams College to complain:

"We may possibly see Crown Point this time twelve months. The expedition goes on very much as a snail runs."

Putnam lived it all over again as his ears kept watch on the forest. There were the three hundred Mohawks painting the face of their beloved leader General Johnson, who knew their hearts, sang their songs and danced their dances and who was to marry Molly Brant, one of their women. There was Johnson, always genial and pleasing, finding time for his wine and lunch although the delays and muddlings piled up to a grotesque extent.

Already the French knew of the proposed campaign from letters found on Braddock's stricken field. There was the aged and corpulent Hendrick, mighty chief of the Mohawks, who told Johnson on the morning of the battle with Dieskau's forces that the English detachments sent into battle were "too few to fight and too many to be killed." A brave man was Hendrick, son of the Wolf, a Mohegan man, and a Mohawk woman; for although he knew he was going to his death he harangued his warriors from a gun-carriage, and being too fat to walk to war borrowed a horse of Johnson and went out to be bayoneted to death. Had General Johnson heeded the old chief's advice there would have been no "bloody morning scout" as a preliminary to the capture of Baron Dieskau.

But if the English had missed an opportunity there was at least the satisfaction of knowing the enemy was not a harmonious unit. From prisoners taken by the rangers it was commonly known that Vaudreuil did not want Montcalm, but had hoped himself to be commander-in-chief of all the French.

The fact of his father having governed New France before him imbued him with a great respect for his own abilities. Then again he was Canadian born and had little liking for those from France.

This cleavage between the governor and general was noticeable also in the army. The troops of the line from France viewed the colonial regulars with contempt. The interests of the latter were almost entirely confined to Canada and the development of the fur trade. Then came the militia, caring only for Canada, excellent bushfighters but of small caliber when it came to war in the open.

There was no branch in the French army which was self-dependent, but neither the troops of the line, the colonial regulars, nor the militia would ever admit as much. No; it was not all easy sailing for the French, although their consolidated command, the fact that nearly all Canadians were soldiers and not home-builders, as were the English, gave them a great advantage in taking the initiative. When it came to sticking and taking punishment and doggedly holding on, they lacked the inspiration of homely homes and rude clearings.

And now that Oswego had fallen Putnam believed the white and violet of the French regulars and the white and black of the Canadians would soon sail up Lake George, preceded by their militia and their howling red allies.

"Give something to settle our nerves and I'd thank God for their coming. One good stand-up give-and-take fight, and we'd own all this country for all time," he told himself as the desire for a decisive battle surged through his veins and for a bit allowed him to forget the purpose of his vigil.

"*Hoo, hoo-hoo?*" called the owl from the pitch black of the forest tops.

"Regular and correct," mechanically classified the ranger.

An animal scurried through the undergrowth at the edge of the woods without causing the sentinel to turn his head. The owl ceased its queries and for a while there was silence. There came the soft *pad, pad* of some creature sniffing and snuffling through the bushes. There was no more suggestion of concealment than any wild creature would practise on stealing close to a camp where men slept.

Putnam's ears, tuned to catch very vague alarms, at first passed over the awkward attempt at stealth of this prowler. Subconsciously, however, he caught up the shuffling steps and the snufflings that told him it was a bear, and began analyzing them. The snuffling continued, supplemented by sounds of rooting at the foot of a tree or under a decaying log.

Putnam placed his hat on a post and dropped on one knee. The animal, seemingly less cautious, gradually drew nearer the sentinel. Putnam carefully located the sound and softly called out—

"Who goes there?"

He had no intention that his voice should carry to the intruder's ears, but orders were orders.

The rooting continued, also the eager snapping of hungry teeth. Speaking even more gently and much more rapidly than on the first call, Putnam twice repeated the challenge and fired. As he fired he leaped from the stockade with his ax in his hand.

Something floundered and kicked convulsively for a few moments, but the sounds ceased as Putnam gained the bush. He had visualized the spot in his mind and proceeded to swing wide of it in the thick darkness as if he were working in broad daylight. He passed around it, then gradually narrowed his circle, his ears on the alert.

Finally something told him that his quest was ended; and, stretching out his ax, he touched something that yielded. He gave it several prods, then leaped upon it with the lightness of a lynx.

At first he was filled with shame, thinking it was a bear; for his fingers had passed over the furry coat of bruin. A further sweep of his hands, however, restored his self-esteem. Stepping aside he jerked off the bearskin and swiftly examined the naked body beneath. It was that of a gigantic Indian, and the balls from his smooth-bore had riddled the head.

"GOOD ——! It's got Putnam!" yelled a frantic voice from the post. "Here's his gun and cap!" Lights began to spring up.

"Fetch out a torch and my gun, men," called out Putnam. "I'm still alive and kicking. That's more'n I can say of some other folks in this neighborhood."

"A French trick!" cried a soldier.

"Is that really you, Captain Putnam?" demanded an anxious voice.

"It couldn't really be any one else," dryly retorted Putnam. "Bring a light. I've bagged the sentinel-killer. And bring my gun and cap."

With a whoop of rejoicing the men streamed into the bush, waving torches of bark and pitch-pine. As they came up to Putnam they cried aloud in amazement on beholding the immense bulk of the dead Indian. He was naked, oiled and painted, and armed only with a knife.

"He's a Potawatomi," said Putnam. "Lived out beyond the big lakes. We got three that was prowling round Fort William Henry and killing the sentinels with arrows. That's their strong point; sneaking in and killing a man at a time. They was all big fellows.

"The Mission Indians are the best reds that Montcalm has. Priests keep them under control, and they're not cannibals. But this dog!"

And in loathing he shook the torch at the stark form, hideous with its bands of black and red and yellow, with the head shaven except for the top-knot.

With a growl of rage a soldier pulled a knife and ripped off the scalp. Putnam would have remonstrated at this trespass on his prey, but another whispered—

"His brother was killed by the beast two nights ago."

"Very well. But I must have that hair. I may have use for it," said Putnam. "I'm going on a scout. There'll be no trouble tonight. Don't shoot me when I come in. I'll sing out my name.

"This —— had a camp near here. His friends must be waiting for him to report."

All fears dropped from the soldiers, and to a man they were keen to go with the ranger; but he refused their company, insisting it was a one-man job and that he would let them know if he needed them.

Reloading his gun and taking the scalp, he used a torch in following the tracks until they brought him to the creek. Observing that they came from the west, he threw the torch into the water and began making his way up the creek, confident he would find the Indian's companions camped somewhere near the stream.

Such a camp, he knew, would be small, as only a small band would venture this far south of Lake George. His progress was slow, but after two hours of travel he discerned a reddish glow ahead.

Reconnoitering, he came to a little opening and all but walked upon a warrior seated with his back against a tree. Putnam had made no noise, yet some animal sense aroused the warrior. He stood up and lifted his head, and as he glared about he sniffed the air suspiciously.

On the other side of the opening was a fire, and from beyond it came the sound of wailing and groaning and diabolic yowling. At first Putnam feared some prisoner was being tortured, but a second thought told him this could not be, else the warrior close at hand would be back at the fire watching the sport.

Laying aside his rifle and taking his ax, the ranger glided forward until the same tree sheltered him and the sentinel. It was a pine some six feet in diameter, and with his ax drawn back

the ranger began creeping around it. Inch by inch he advanced until he was almost within the light from the fire. Now he could hear the deep breathing of the savage.

Another inch, and through the smoke of the fire he observed a line of warriors with their backs to him, their eyes fastened on a skin lodge, or medicine-tent. Satisfied that their attention was held for a minute, he gripped his ax, stepped round the boll and shattered the sentinel's head, and caught the falling body and eased it down into a sitting posture. The dead sentinel clutched a bow and arrow in his hands.

So this was the lair of the beast that killed at night. Already a plan for reprisal was working in the ranger's mind. The presence of the medicine-tent and the absence of guns so far as he could see told him these were Western Indians, undoubtedly Potawatomis. Next to exterminating them the best thing would be to frighten them so thoroughly that they would go and stay away.

"Guess I'll need your hair," he mused.

With a grunt of disgust he bent over the sentinel and circled his knife about the filthy scalplock and its ornaments of feathers. Adding it to the one he had brought from the post, he glided back into the woods and crept half-way around the tent, or until he stood behind it.

Peeping around the edge of the lodge, he beheld a dozen Indians and a Frenchman. The latter was enveloped in a beaver skin blanket like his companions, but retained his black three-cornered hat, marking him as one of the troops of the line, probably a petty officer.

Indians and white men were intently watching the medicine-tent. In the front of this at the height of a man's head, was a small opening. Occasionally the sorcerer's head appeared here, a fearful head with its layers of paint, its terrible, grimacing features and continuous crackling of speech issuing from the frenzied lips.

Although Putnam did not know it this was a famous sorcerer who far behind the big lakes was renowned for his power. He could kill a man many sleeps away simply by making an image of the man and willing him to death.

Here within a short journey of the outpost he had dared to set up his death-lodge and work death against the soldiers. The big brave who wore the bearskin was merely the executioner. The sorcerer was the one to receive the credit. Between the lodge and the fire and close to the former were two crotched sticks. Suspended to the sapling suspended between these were five scalps stretched on frameworks of birch.

The sorcerer thrust his fearful visage up to the open and commenced a frenzied prophecy. He told the Indians and the Frenchman that scalps and dead bodies were coming this night to the camp of the Potawatomi. No longer would the Creeping Bear be satisfied with one victim, but he would slay many.

On the morrow the Potawatomi with their brave white ally would attack the post, all dressed in the skins of bears, and find the garrison so frightened that they would kill them like so many rabbits. Had Putnam understood this blood-curdling harangue he would have half-believed such an attack was bound to succeed had not the midnight slayer been discovered and slain.

So absorbed were the spectators in watching the lodge that Putnam ventured to crawl much closer to the lodge. Now the sorcerer withdrew from the opening, screaming madly and calling out that his manito was with him and giving him great power. The lodge shook and trembled as if being flung about by demons.

The Indians at the fire crouched lower in their blankets; the officer unconsciously crossed himself. Suddenly the sorcerer raised the flap of the sacred lodge and danced out into full view, For part of a minute he stood here in the full glare of the fire, his eyes rolling, his teeth showing like a wolf's fangs, and his whole naked body seemingly in the grip of some mighty convulsion.

But what impressed the spectators and caused even Putnam to open his eyes wide in amazement was that the sorcerer appeared to be sweating blood.

Vanishing inside the lodge as abruptly as he had emerged, the sorcerer renewed his screaming. There came the sounds of other voices—one that was very deep and rumbling, another as thin and piping as the voice of a child. Then was added a third, the groaning of a woman.

These typed the victims awaiting the stout-hearted attack of the Potawatomi—the deep-voiced Englishman, little children and their mothers. The Indians clutched their axes and knives and breathed hard as they had visions of slaughter along the northern frontier.

Again the Frenchman crossed himself. Even Putnam, although ignorant of their language, sensed the symbolical meaning of the ventriloquial display and gritted his teeth and softly swore a round Saxon oath.

"Time I give them some new kind of witchcraft, the heathens!" he grimly decided as he wormed backward until squarely behind the lodge.

The rear of the lodge was too sacred for warriors to trespass upon, as their presence would embarrass the sorcerer in performing his ghastly tricks. Once more the lodge commenced to sway back and forth, its sides bellying out as if a tempest were trying to uproot it. The sorcerer set up a yelping defiance as if daring the wind-gods to do their worst.

As Putnam crawled nearer, a lean brown hand darted out from under the flap and snatched a rattle from the ground. Then came the voice of the rattle on the inside; and this clamor was kept up for half a minute. As it was thrust outside again the voices returned.

Apparently the fierce screaming of the sorcerer continued steadily; thus demonstrating that the other voices were those of spirits. There was the man's voice, now crying aloud as he went to the torture, the feeble complaints of the little children and the hopeless shrieks of the women.

"That's more'n a human being ought to stand," muttered Putnam, his face now hard as granite.

Grunts of amazement and fear sounded from the row of spectators.

"I'll give them some new medicine, the ——!" gritted Putnam.

LEAVING his gun on the ground and pulling his knife, he crouched by the lodge and ran his fingers under the flap. Waiting until the clamor inside increased to unusual proportions—for now the sorcerer was about to complete his masterpiece in effect—Putnam raised the flap and entered. The sorcerer was bending over a gourd of white earth and was rapidly smearing it over his face, all the time screeching like a demon.

Suddenly he leaped erect and thrust his head through the opening. The spectators gasped in fear at the hideous pallor of his countenance, more terrible than the paint. Ducking back, he reached for the gourd, but stiffened, his mouth open, yet uttering no sound.

He sensed the ranger's presence and slowly turned his head, his mouth still agape. Putnam caught him by the throat, breaking the spell. The death-cry rose in a shrill crescendo, accompanied by a frantic thrust with a French trade-knife. Putnam parried the blow and drove his own blade home. The death-yell terminated with startling abruptness and evoked a grunt of astonishment from those outside. The Frenchman crossed himself and exclaimed—

"Mille diables!"

The sorcerer's form collapsed. He barely struck the ground before his hair was off. Crouching below the small opening, Putnam hurled the scalps of the sorcerer, the sentinel and the sentinel-killer into the group before the fire.

With yelps of terror the warriors glared at the ghastly trophies. Their minds were stupefied. From the lodge had come the voices of the English about to die beneath their axes. That had been a welcome assurance. But this death-cry of the medicine-man himself, so strangely terminated, formed a discord.

Of course the sorcerer's manito had presented them with the three scalps; therefore they must be scalps of enemies. They stared stupidly at the three exhibits. Undeniably they were beholding examples of Potawatomi hair decorations. With an inarticulate cry one of the warriors advanced a trembling finger and designated the scalp-lock of the sorcerer, calling attention to the streak of gray that identified it beyond all doubt.

Putnam by this time had rubbed some of the white earth over his face. Grimacing horribly, he allowed his pallid countenance to be seen at the opening for the space of two seconds. The savages howled at this astounding display of magic. The sorcerer, aided by his powerful manito, had scalped himself. Just what this marvelous and grewsome magic portended was beyond their simple minds to understand.

Suddenly one of them gave a hoarse shout, thinking he had discovered the purpose of the magic. He frantically told his companions that the medicine-man had painted his face white to represent a white man. His manito was again telling them they should have white scalps. Now he would cause his scalp to leap back into the lodge and to its place on his head; and the seance would be over.

But Putnam had not achieved his grand climax. Seizing the center pole of the lodge, he began tumbling and rocking the lodge violently. To the spectators this was a familiar evidence of the manito's presence; and they braced themselves for further demonstrations of the god. Yanking and pulling on the pole, Putnam ducked under the flap of skin. As he crawled into the free air he carried the end of the pole with him.

As he gained the bushes the lodge wilted to the ground and began to turn inside out. Finding his rifle, the ranger braced his heels and pulled the wreckage of the lodge toward him, thereby exposing the dead sorcerer. His whitened face and red poll were in fearful contrast. As one man the row of savages and the Frenchman rose to their feet, glaring at the dead man, then slowly shifted their gaze to the gray scalp at their feet.

The sorcerer had been killed and scalped by his manito. The midnight slaying of English sentinels had angered the god. Lifting their voices in a long-drawn-out scream, savages and white ally bolted from the scene.

As they ran the foremost man tripped over the body of the dead brave at the foot of the pine and pitched headlong. The mob swept over the prostrate man. And as he staggered to his feet it was only to go down again with the ranger's ax in the back of his head.

CHAPTER V

ALONG DIESKAU'S PATH

WELL satisfied with his night's work, Putnam returned to the post and found a squad of nervous men about to set forth in search of him. He reported the presence of the Western Indians and the Frenchman to the lieutenant, who sent a messenger to General

Lyman at Fort Edward as well as detailing a force to capture the foe.

This taking of prisoners was as important as the harassing of supply-trains and the destruction of enemy property. Both the English and French impressed upon their scouting-parties the imperative necessity of securing captives. It was largely through these that one antagonist learned what the other was planning to do.

Realizing the importance of capturing some of the trespassers, especially the officer, Putnam snatched two hours of sorely needed sleep and undertook a lone hunt for the terrified band. He scouted much more rapidly than the squad from the fort and at last found the trail leading northwest.

He followed it until it split up into several trails and decided the odds against success were too great to warrant a persistence in the task. The finding of Elizabeth Lidindick and the prevention of her sending information to Ticonderoga was fully as vital as the capture of the French officer.

Abandoning the chase, he turned his steps toward Fort Anne and traveled rapidly. His gaze constantly read the forest floor more from habit than because he expected to detect any enemy signs; and after covering several miles he was surprized to cut across a trail from the west.

There were a dozen men in the party, he estimated, one being a white man. The latter wore moccasins but was unable to disguise the white man's fashion of walking. It dawned on Putnam that this band, traveling rapidly and never pausing to hide their trail, was the same that had fled in terror from before the lodge of the dead sorcerer.

Anticipating pursuit from the post, they had split up and separated only to come together again. Now they were eager to strike Wood Creek and follow it down to Ticonderoga.

Their course promised to lead near Fort Anne, where they could follow Shone Creek to Wood, then on to South Bay, where doubtless they had canoes concealed. The remainder of the trip through the "Drowned Lands" into Lake Champlain would depend entirely upon their caution and a certain amount of night travel.

In the Spring of the preceding year Putnam had worked at chopping a road which was planned to follow Wood Creek down to Ticonderoga, and over which the English army was to advance. Johnson had recalled the axmen after deciding that the Lake George route would be better. That experience and a full year of scouting back and forth on both sides of George permitted Putnam to carry an exact map of the country in his head.

At midday he reached Shone Creek, the western tributary to Wood, a mile south of old Fort Anne. Here he made a discovery. Where the fleeing band had incautiously crossed the stream he observed that another trailer had cut in ahead of him, having come up from the south.

The new imprint was much smaller than those it followed and trod upon. The new tracks were also very fresh, as they had collected hardly any moisture although made in soil that was almost ooze. One impression on a rock near the opposite bank had not had time to dry.

Naturally Putnam thought of the Lidindick girl. She was hastening to overtake the savages, perhaps to gain Ticonderoga under their escort. Either that or she purposed sending some messsage by them.

Once away from the creek the signs were few and faint, and consisting of barely perceptible traces—a pebble partly dislodged from its earthy socket, or a twig scuffed from its matrix in the forest mold. Tiny voices, yet loud enough to assure the ranger that he was hot on the scent.

The course bore east of the creek, the signs being noticeable when the fugitives crossed any of the numerous rivulets. And always the small moccasins of the new trailer were to be found on top of the other tracks.

When about a mile above the old fort Putnam received his second surprize; another pair of moccasins cut in from the west and joined the others, treading upon the small tracks. A glance told him that this newcomer was a man of solid bulk, one who walked with the free, easy stride of the woodwise.

He was inventorying this fact when a violent agitation of some alders in a marshy spot ahead sent him diving to cover. There came a gurgling sound as if some one were choking; then an angry voice snarled:

"There! You young ——, cat!"

SPRINGING to his feet and running forward, Putnam burst upon a strange scene. A slim Indian youth was writhing on the ground, trying to recover his breath, while Ephraim Willis sat on a log and tied his queue ribbon around a wound in his leg. At one side half-buried in the mire was a knife.

Now the youth got back his breath, and with the agility of a lynx leaped upon Willis and tore at him with his bare hands. With an oath Willis seized him and lifted him high above his head.

"Halt," cried Putnam, leaping into view. "Put him down."

"But the young hellion——"

"Put him down instantly. I vouch for him."

Growling viciously, Willis dropped the boy, who promptly snatched a knife from Putnam's belt and would have renewed his attack had not Putnam clutched his arm and wrenched the weapon from him, and demanded—

"How long since Joseph Brant of the Mohawks has made war on the English, the friends of Sir William Johnson?"

"English!" panted the boy, who was not over fourteen years of age. "Look at his French shirt. If he is English he is a renegade. My Mohawks shall roast and eat him.

"You cold-blooded young devil," gasped Willis, astounded at such a speech from one he considered to be a child. "Wait till I get this hole in my leg tied up to suit and I'll give you the spanking of your life."

"Enough of that, Willis," Putnam sternly commanded. "Keep your mouth shut till you can speak with decency."

Then to the boy, who struggled anew at the ranger's humiliating threat—

"Does a Mohawk warrior squirm like a cat when he knows he can not escape?"

Instantly the boy remembered his etiquette and stood with folded arms, glaring death at Willis, his thin chest rising and falling spasmodically; and this not from physical exhaustion but because of the shame the ranger's words had put upon him. Putnam released him, picked up the knife from the mud, wiped it clean and handed it to him, and gravely explained:

"This man is no renegade. He wears the hunting-shirt of our rangers far south. He is a friend of Sir William Johnson's. He came here from the Ohio, where you were born when your father and mother went hunting there. He has fought the Shawnees and Delawares and the Indians from above the big lakes. He comes to help Sir William Johnson whip the French."

"He struck me and choked me," was the guttural reminder.

"Well, —— your hide, did you do my leg any good?" roared Willis, holding up his blood-stained fingers and then pointing to his tightly tied queue ribbon.

A glint of satisfaction shone in young Brant's eyes. After all he had inflicted a worse injury than he had received. Beyond the slap at his pride he was uninjured.

"Willis, shut up," growled Putnam. "Joseph Brant took his first war-path last Summer when he went with General Johnson to Lake George. He wouldn't have jumped you if he hadn't believed you was French. He knows all of Rogers' men, and you was a stranger."

Willis hung his head and confessed:

"Well, mebbe the cub had some excuse. I was in the top of a big pitch-pine, watching the different openings in the bush. I saw a small band hustling along, one a white man. I put after them and found this youngster's tracks. Thinking he was one of the band, and wanting to take him off his guard, I asked on coming up to him —

" '*Qui êtes vous?*' "

" '*Qui êtes vous?*' " shrilly repeated young Brant, pointing an accusing finger. "My father was of the Wolf clan. I heard the man's French. I jumped. The Wolf does not wait all day before making his kill."

"It's all very plain. It's all a mistake," soothed Putnam, with a side wink at Willis. "Your using French lingo made him think you was French. No, keepers of the eastern door will ount more coups than he will by the time he has finished."

"If I'd known you was a English Mohawk, Brant, I'd never spoke that cursed French," mumbled Willis.

"Not English!" hissed Brant. "I am a Mohawk of the Extended Lodge. My home is at the Canajoharie Castle in the Mohawk Valley. No nation in the Long House has fought like mine. At one and the same time my people have carried on war with the Abnaki on the east, with the Conestoga in the south, with the Huron dogs and many Algonquin tribes in the west and north. We conquered the Delawares and made them say they were women and not fit to carry arms."

"But if the Dutch hadn't come along and given you guns you'd 'a' been wiped out," reminded Willis.

"Enough of that, Willis, or you go back to Albany town," thundered Putnam, whose one desire was to remove any possible cause for a quarrel between the loyal Mohawks and the English.

Then to the angry youth:

"You were following our enemies. They were running from me. I killed four of them last night. They were wild Potawatomi men."

"Good. You are a brave man," softly cried Brant, his eyes glittering with admiration, his hand flashing out his knife and raising it in salute.

"I overturned their medicine-lodge. I killed their sorcerer and threw his scalp in the face of his warriors."

"Good! Some time I will do the same, and the women will make up songs about my name!" exclaimed Brant, again saluting.

"Ask him if he's seen the girl," Willis requested.

"You were following our enemies. Did you see a white girl dressed as a man with them?"

"There was no white girl with them."

"Have you seen a white girl in the woods anywhere? One dressed as a ranger?"

Young Brant folded his arms and stared blankly at the towering pines.

"Which means he has, I guess," mused Putnam. "And also means he'll say nothing. She has been to Canajoharie Castle and was welcome there. No use wasting any time on him."

"Not a bit," agreed Willis. "I know enough of their natur' to see that. Anyway he has answered us by his silence."

The boy understood all this but gave no sign, his face remaining stolid almost to the degree of stupidity. Putnam said to him:

"You must be friends with my friend, with

Sir William's friend, this ranger from the Monongahela and the Ohio. We must overtake those cowardly Western Indians and capture the French officer."

"The Mohawks will eat the French officer. That for Hendrick's death."

"We will catch him first," said Putnam.

"We would have eaten Dieskau if Sir William Johnson hadn't stopped us."

"We must catch this bird before we cook him," soothed Putnam. "Willis, can you travel?"

"I can always travel. Let us be going, or we'll never overtake them."

YOUNG Brant, clothed only in thigh-leggings and breech-cloth, darted away like a weasel, easily picking up the trail and speedily leaving the rangers behind. He purposely left marks that they might follow at top speed and they soon saw the trail was doubling back to the creek. They followed until the trail ended at the bank.

Putnam scouted the opposite bank while Willis remained quiet and nursed his leg and muttered maledictions against the young Mohawk. Returning to him, Putnam remarked:

"They never crossed. They knew they was followed and they took to the creek to hide their trail. I think they must have found a canoe, as the bottom don't seem to be riled up and the water's hardly had time to settle. There ain't scarcely any current. How do you feel?"

"Ugly. This leg seems bound to bleed quite a lot. The whole kit of them Mohawks are a nuisance to us. We'd be better off without them."

"Not much good," agreed Putnam. "But when you must have dealings with them don't go out of your way to rile them. For if the Long House should lend any help to the French our porridge is spilled.

"Vaudreuil is keen to get more and more of the red devils, but after Dieskau fell into our grip he told me that they nearly drove him crazy. They was eating up his oxen and hogs and drinking his brandy about as fast as he could get it down from Montreal.

"He had planned to attack Fort Lyman when he come against us at William Henry. But his Indians wouldn't go there; afraid of the big guns. They was willing to attack Johnson, though. Lord! what a day that was. I was plumb discouraged when Johnson ordered five hundred men to march to Lyman at Fort Edward, and another five hundred to march toward South Bay.

"I'll never forget how old Hendrick broke a stick, then picked up a bundle of sticks and showed Johnson he couldn't break them. Johnson saw the point and kept his thousand men together. Well, you must get back to the road and catch a teamster and go to Fort Edward or Albany."

"I ain't hurt enough for that. A couple of days' lay-off at Fort Willaim Henry——"

"Small pox and other sickness there. Back to Edward, or Albany. That's your orders. Hold due west and pass south of French Mountain. You won't have to wait long before getting a ride."

"What do I do after this hole gets mended?"

"If you ain't heard from me, scout up this way and find me."

With that Putnam turned down the east bank of the creek, trusting that young Brant would pick up the trail and give his "discovery" signal.

He had not traveled long when the quiet of the creek was disturbed by a scattering volley.

"Our men attacking them," he exulted, for the Indians he had frightened from the sorcerer's lodge had carried no firearms.

He started on the run, anxious to arrive in time to save the French officer, but came to a halt with his gun flung forward as a figure came through the bushes toward him.

One glance at the strong face and the grotesquely shaped and abnormally big nose, and his gun fell to his side.

"Major Rogers!" he greeted. "Your men have jumped some Indians I have been trailing all the way from back of Fort Edward."

"I know, cap'n. Seth Pomeroy and a dozen rangers are chasing them to give them a dressing. They don't need us. I told them to take the officer alive and carry him to the fort. I hurried down here to meet you. Where's your new man?"

"Wounded and on his way to Fort Edward. How did you know about him, and that I was here?"

"Young Brant told me. He's keen to be a warrior all in a minute. Sir William is bound he shall go to school like a white man, but he can't ever school the Indian out of him. We've got some big business ahead of us. I'm going to fool the French till they think old Satan hisself is bedeviling them."

Rogers, like Putnam, was sturdily built, and would have been prepossessing in appearance if not for his huge nose. Frontier born and bred, he knew every foot of the country from the Hudson to the St. Lawrence, and had traveled much between the English and French settlements in the rôle of smuggler, as it was generally believed. Despite his shortcomings his services to the colonies as a ranger were immeasurable; for his rangers were the great bulwark against an overwhelming surprize attack of the enemy.

As the sound of firing grew fainter, indicating that some of the fleeing savages at least had managed to escape, Rogers explained in detail his plans to his right-hand man. It was nothing short of a scout below Crown Point and an attack on some of the enemy's shipping.

Its audacity appealed to Putnam instantly.

Many times before this Rogers had picked the Connecticut farmer for his companion on scouts down the lake and to the close vicinity of Ticonderoga. Under their leadership Roger's Rangers had made a name which was a household word throughout the colonies.

After he had finished explaining his plans Putnam briefly related his experiences in Albany and his pursuit of the Lidindick girl. As Rogers listened there was a suggestion of worry on his bold face. His features relaxed, however, when Putnam told of Lidindick's death.

"So Jan the Rogue is dead, eh?" he mused. "It's best so. It's best so."

"Ephraim Willis fears the girl is lost and will come to harm in these wild woods. I fear she will be able to make Montreal and tell a parcel of things we don't want the French to know," added Putnam.

"Elizabeth Lidindick won't get lost," slowly Rogers assured him. "More than once she has ranged the Iroquois country in perfect safety when the English traders didn't dare enter the Mohawk Valley. That's the Dutch blood in her. There's more than one *vrouw* in Albany who has gone alone through the forests of the Long House and made their bargains with the Iroquois, and returned with the best of the bargain at that. Jan's girl can give points to lots of rangers when it comes to following a trail or hiding her own. And old Jan's dead."

Putnam concealed a smile; for he believed Rogers and Lidindick had been partners in many smuggling deals before the war broke out. Rogers now continued:

"About the girl. I don't believe she can do us any harm. If you ever come across her, send for me before turning her over to the army officers. She's a wild little thing and might do herself harm by saying things in a boasting way.

"She isn't the right sort for a spy. Her mother was French. Her father always held it against the English for taking Dutch Orange and making it Albany, and, on the side, spoiling the Dutch traders' game with the Long House. The girl doesn't see where she owes anything to his Majesty. I'm glad your man Willis is interested in her."

"I am not. He's of a sober, honest Connecticut family. She's half-French, half-Dutch. He should take a Connecticut girl for a wife; never this girl, who has dressed up as a fop and strutted through the tap-rooms in New York, and who is now living like a wildcat out in the woods."

"You mustn't misjudge her, Israel," Rogers gravely insisted. "I tell you she is a good girl even if Jan the Rogue was her father, and even if she did cut up some capers down in New York and is doing up here the things you say she is."

"Scalps and brimstone! Didn't I see the message she tried to send through by the Caughnawaga Iroquois? Didn't it advise Montcalm to strike a quick blow now while the colonies are shaken over the fall of Oswego?"

"But she's half-French," Rogers reminded him. "She sees no more harm in that than you do in fetching news to Fort William Henry telling what we can do to Ticonderoga. But this isn't getting us on our way."

AS THERE were no further sounds of the chase and as neither Pomeroy nor any of his men showed up Rogers took it for granted the pursuit of the Indians had continued out of hearing, and at once decided to make for Fort William Henry and get his novel and daring scouting expedition under way. A six-mile tramp across-country brought them to the fort, which consisted of log ramparts reinforced with earth, built in the shape of an irregular square and duly bastioned.

Not much attempt at leveling the surrounding forests had been made until General Winslow received the news of Oswego's fall and the probable advance of the French in force. Now that he daily expected to be attacked he kept his men at work, early and late, felling huge areas of giant trees until the ground for a mile between the fort and the mountain-slopes was one immense abatis. Any approach from the east was guarded against by the extensive marsh-lands. The rangers did not enter the fort as smallpox had broken out and the camp was generally sickly. Skirting the defenses, Rogers led the way to the lake where five light whale-boats awaited him. Twoscore rangers were lounging near these, and in response to their commander's shrill whistle enough more came up on the run to make the total an even fifty men.

These were picked men and obviously had been informed of the part they were to play; for without waiting for further orders they scrambled into the boats. Rogers motioned for Putnam to join him, and as his boat started to lead the way down Lake George he informed the other.

"One thing I haven't told you, and it's the best notion of the whole plan. I had these boats made unusually light. I've been waiting for you to come back to Albany and take part in the fun.

"We'll carry the boats across to South Bay and pass Ticonderoga at night right under their noses and they'll never dream we're anywhere near them. When we strike on Champlain they'll think we dropped from the sky."

The boats were rowed ten miles down the lake without any sign of an enemy scout being discovered. Landing on the east shore behind Long Island, the men were ordered to follow behind Rogers and Putnam, each ten carrying one of the boats.

The course pursued by Rogers led through a gorge in the mountains and entered Dieskau's

Path almost at right angles. This path was made by Baron Dieskau's force in the previous Fall, when the baron marched to capture Fort William Henry and was himself taken prisoner. Arriving at South Bay, the boats were launched and the men allowed to rest. Night came, and after eating a cold ration the men prepared to row down the creek to within eight miles of Ticonderoga.

Putnam, uneasy when inactive, gained permission to scout along Dieskau's Path, between which and the creek extended a strip of marsh, or as the English called it, "the Drowned Lands." He covered five miles through the darkness and came to a brook that emptied into a small sheet of water, which was to be known as "Putnam's Pond." After he had forded this and had halted to reconnoiter the darkness with his ears he heard a sound of splashing, carelessly made and yet not such as that which a fish makes in breaking water. Noiselessly feeling his way to the mouth of the brook, he gained the edge of the pond, when more splashing brought him to a halt.

Whatever was disturbing the water was on his left, and as he turned in that direction he found a growth of bushes barred his way. He worked cautiously along this low wall until his moccasins found a narrow game-trail.

Droping on all fours to avoid the interlacing boughs, he followed the narrow tunnel for a rod or two. His hands touched something that caused him to draw back on his heels and throw up his rifle to ward off a blow. The splashing was repeated and the cause of his alarm remained innocuous.

Stretching forth a hand, he gently passed it back and forth until satisfied it was a hunting-shirt, heavily befringed. Extending his discoveries, he found the other garments and a ranger's hat and a pair of moccasins. It was not until he picked up a moccasin that he began to understand; and his lips puckered to emit a low whistle of surprize.

Catching himself in time, he clamped his lips together grimly and examined the footgear with both hands. Finally replacing it, he softly called—

"Elizabeth Lidindick!"

"*Qui êtes vous?*" gasped a frightened voice.

"Israel Putnam. I'm going back to the path. You stop your swimming and come ashore and put on your clothes. Then you'll go to Fort Edward with me."

He could hear her catch her breath in dismay. Then she frantically promised:

"Yes, yes, Captain Putnam. I'll come as soon as you go."

"I'm going now, and you be sharp. I've got six children back home. Four of them are little girls. I'm going back to the main path, and you see that you hustle ashore."

With this warning he noisily returned to the path and waited. He didn't know whether to be glad or sorry for stumbling upon the girl. It meant he must at least conduct her as far as Fort William Henry, where he might secure an escort to take her to General Lyman.

Because of the smallpox at William Henry he would not dare take any escort unless it be some of the rangers who camped apart from the garrison. But even should he succeed in this particular the delay would compel him to miss taking part in Major Rogers' daring venture down Lake Champlain. The prospect of foregoing this treat caused him to scowl heavily and feel unkindly toward the girl.

"The bothersome minx," he groaned. "Has to turn up just as we're going to have some fun. Why couldn't she be caught while that moon-calf of a Ephraim Willis was on hand to take her in charge?"

And yet the capture was most important. It was a piece of good luck that should give him much pleasure. It meant the stopping of a most dangerous leak. Aside from the general information which she would find ways of obtaining and sending through to the French, she would have been sure to discover the Rogers expedition.

"You 'most ready?" he impatiently called out.

"Almost. Is Ephraim Willis with you?"

"In Albany. Wounded."

"Oh, I'm so sorry."

"Probably. I'm in a hurry. Come out here soon's you can."

"I'm coming in just a minute."

He thought he heard her enter the path, and he stood with his gun outstretched, so she might not play any tricks and duck by him in the darkness and follow the path north. Since Rogers declared her woodcraft was superior to that of many rangers Putnam did not propose she should evade him.

His arm grew weary of holding out the gun and he knew she had had ample time to join him. But if she had quit the path he was positive his sharp hearing would have detected the move.

"Elizabeth Lidindick," he softly called.

There was no answer.

"I am coming to you. You're trying to make a fool of me," he warned.

The quiet of the woods and marsh continued. He turned back into the bushes but had advanced only a few steps when her mocking laugh rang out in the direction of the little brook. Retracing his steps to the path, he made for the brook, hoping to overtake her. But as he reached the stream she laughed again, this time farther away.

"The hussy fooled me!" he muttered. "But what can a man do when he comes on a young woman in swimming? Well, it's good riddance if she keeps moving south. We can pick her up when we come back. I've done my part, and

to chase her in this darkness would be just the kind of a game she would like to play."

WITH his conscience clear, he found he was much relieved by her escape. He was free to continue his original errand, and he turned about and pressed on north as fast as the darkness would permit. There was the imminent danger that she too would change her course and follow him and seek to learn the reason of his abandoning pursuit of her to scout toward Ticonderoga. Yet he could not see how to combat with that contingency.

Four miles beyond Two Rocks was a brook that all but cut the neck of land from Lake George to the creek. It was at the mouth of this stream that Rogers would hide his boats and men during the day. On reaching the rendezvous Putnam proposed to throw out a guard to cover the path. If the girl followed him she would walk into a trap.

From the pond to the brook was nearly ten miles. Anxious to cover the distance and report the girl's possible presence to Rogers, Putnam swept his gun back and forth before him and rapidly passed through the darkness, his woodcraft keeping him informed of wolf and fox and bear lurking on either side of the trail.

Aside from the licensed night prowlers he discovered no trace of enemy scouts. Once he thought he heard an alien rustling on the bushes on his left, a slight sound instinct would not accept as being harmless. But almost before the suspicion could grow the diabolic yowling of a wildcat eased his mind and he passed on.

That first protest of the subconscious demanded recognition, however; and after a few rods he halted and listened. There was no further yowling, no sound of the creature passing through the bush.

For five minutes he waited, almost tempted to return. Then in the woods ahead of him he detected a faint noise and decided that the cat was genuine. It had stalked him for a bit and on catching the man-smell had passed on ahead to seek better game.

He resumed his way and was passing under a big spruce when instinct again told him to be on his guard, only this time it seemed to shriek the warning. Before he could set in motion any process of reasoning he threw up the gun bebetween both hands to shield his head just as a light body, dropping from an overhanging bough, fell upon him. Dropping the gun and leaping back, he caught a wildly struggling figure in his arms and cut his fingers slightly on a knife. As he felt the slim, wiry limbs writhing desperately to break his hold he ejaculated—

"Brant!"

The struggling figure became quiet.

"Captain Putnam?" sorrowfully asked the boy.

"The same, youngster; and you've cut my hand. No coup, or new name for that, eh?"

"Ugh! Then I will cut my own."

And he placed a hand on Putnam's wrist and the ranger felt the drip of warm blood.

"Good Heavens, you young fool! What did you want to do that for? It don't help me any. Bad enough for one of us to be sliced up," rebuked Putnam. "You making a noise like a wildcat back there?"

"It was a Mohawk cat," confessed young Brant. "I thought I was discovered just as I was getting ready to attack. So I ran ahead and got up in the tree."

"What are you doing up here? Did Pomeroy get the Frenchman?"

"He got away," hissed the boy, and he spat in the darkness to show his contempt for the white man's woodcraft. "They killed some of the Indians. Dirty dogs!"

"What are you up here for?" repeated Putnam.

"I was trying to catch the Frenchman. I heard boats in the river. I think the French went to attack the fort and got afraid and are going home. I shall try to find a scalp."

"Our men in the boats," Putnam told him.

Then came an inspiration, and he asked—

"Do you want to do good work for the English?"

"For the English and Sir William. I do not care much about the English who live over here."

"For Sir William then. I have just left Jan the Rogue's daughter back in the path. She must not come this way or the French will capture us, and some of those Two Mountain Indians will have us in a kettle. You know her. Find her and see that she goes to General Lyman."

"The Mohawks call her the Laughing One. She has been to our castles many times. She knows the woods like an Indian. I will find her. She shall not go to Ticonderoga."

"See she is taken to General Lyman. He will send her to Albany, where she can do no more mischief."

Young Brant moved away from him, then softly called back:

"She shall go where she will so long as she doesn't go north. She is a friend of my people."

"That's the Mohawk of it," grumbled Putnam. "The brat is crazy to become a warrior by killing the French. But he'd turn against the settlers to help that minx."

CHAPTER VI

IN THE ENEMY'S COUNTRY

WITH the first lessening of the darkness Putnam reached the brook where the whaleboats were to be concealed. Crossing this, he kept on for a quarter of a mile to mislead any

hostile scout and then retraced his steps with such care as to leave no trail.

By means of an overhanging bough he swung himself into the water without disturbing the bank and commenced wading toward the creek. As he drew near the mouth a voice from behind the bushes softly called:

"All right, cap'n. I knew you was coming."

It was Major Rogers. Putnam gained the bank, glanced back at the sluggish current and said—

"The muddy water told you, eh?"

Rogers nodded, and asked—

"Any discoveries along the path?"

"One."

And Putnam reported his night's adventures.

Rogers' face was very serious as Putnam related the finding of the Lidindick girl, but brightened as he listened to young Brant's promise to prevent the girl from proceeding north.

"He's only a boy, but he'll see that she keeps south of the lake," Rogers declared. "And I'd rather she was loose in the woods about Fort William Henry than to be in Albany, where she would be sure to get information from some love-sick young officer. I'd be sorry to have any harm come to her."

"She didn't ought to be out in these woods prowling round," protested Putnam.

Rogers chuckled and said:

"Wish I could scout about and be as safe as she is. I don't believe that even the Ottawas and the Menominees would hurt her, while our own Mohawks will fight to protect her. They like her. They call her the Laughing One. She's been down the Mohawk Valley more'n once.

"Why, even if the Long House should turn against us—which God forbid and Sir William Johnson prevent—she would be safe enough. Vaudreuil can't find any one who can come and go where she can so long as the rangers don't catch her."

"If the Western Indians catch her and haven't any French officers with them to vouch for her she would fare hideously," insisted Putnam.

"Perhaps. But they won't catch her. Besides, Montcalm by this time has sent out word to all his redskins to treat her right."

"Bah! Make those filthy creatures understand, let alone making them obey!" jeered Putnam. "Forgetting she is a spy and trying to do us sad mischief, she didn't ought to be allowed to run such risk. I guess she must be pretty as a picture. Young Willis is crazy about her. Then think of the young imp going in swimming within two rods of Dieskau's Path!"

"She's a wild little thing. Still she was safe enough. It was nothing to her dressing up as a young fop and swaggering around New York. They're still talking about her down there, the women rolling their eyes in holy horror, the men cursing because young Willis interfered and helped her out of a bad fix.

"She also went into the tea-house and chucked young matrons under the chin and nearly brought on several duels before her secret was discovered. But she's a good girl, Putnam. I used to know her father. I've seen quite a bit of her."

"Of course she's good," declared Putnam. "That makes it hard to deal with her. She's young, she's sweet as a mayflower, and she's good; but she can raise more deviltry between us and the French than a whole regiment of our provincials can smooth out. I vow, I wish some strapping chap would marry her offhand and make her behave since we can't hang her."

"Maybe Willis will."

"No, no. A Connecticut girl for a Connecticut man. Now for some sleep."

THROUGHOUT the long day the scouting-party remained concealed with all but the sentries sleeping. At dusk cold rations were issued and eaten.

When it was dark enough to mask their movements the men entered the boats and with muffled oars resumed their hazardous journey. If it succeeded it would rank as one of the most audacious coups any body of scouts ever accomplished.

Keeping close to the eastern shore, the boats were quietly propelled down the long, narrow arm of the lake which was spoken of as Wood Creek in local nomenclature. As the little flotilla passed Ticonderoga the French sentinels seemed to be within the toss of a biscuit. They could plainly be heard calling the watchword as they paced their beats.

The very boldness of the venture was in favor of its success. Unless some of the savages or soldiers accidentally discovered the boats there could be no suspicions of their presence.

The French believed that when Ticonderoga was attacked the route would be down Lake George by boat and along the road skirting its western shore. If the left bank of the lake's outlet were followed, with the attacking army crossing Trout Brook, or if the English should cut across the bend of the outlet at the Carrying-Place, the result remained the same for Ticonderoga—the attack must come from the west.

The French had established outposts both at the head of the lake and north of the rapids which filled the stream connecting the two lakes. Bordering the southern shore of the outlet, where it merged with the mouth of Wood Creek, was a long and deep morass. With this morass and the outlet to protect it

on the south, with the lake behind it, Ticonderoga built advanced entrenchments and a bristling abatis east of the fort and complacently awaited an attack.

Scouting-parties from Fort William Henry invariably went down Lake George in boats or canoes as far as Sabbath Day Point or some such advanced position, and stealthily advanced on foot to within two or three miles of Ticonderoga. These bands usually consisted of but few men, and their coming was always expected and at times checked. To carry five whale-boats across to South Bay and to pass the fort on the east was a feat the French had never dreamed of guarding against.

The morning light found the adventurers at the mouth of a brook half-way between Ticonderoga and Crown Point. The boats were drawn up under the drooping foliage along the bank and cunningly concealed.

Now they were in the midst of much activity. Bateaux were constantly passing to and from the fort. For fifty men to lie hidden throughout a Summer day, their position at times being within a few rods of passing enemy craft, without any accident or carelessness betraying their presence, would have been impossible of achievement except for those trained under Rogers and his capable captains.

Putnam and Rogers shared the responsibility of guarding against discovery, and found but one point of weakness; the sleeping men would snore at times. When this happened a man found his wind shut off until he woke and learned of his delinquency.

That night they encountered their first open risk. They had swung clear of their hiding-place and were straightening out in a line when Putnam insisted that the night was too clear for them to pass Crown Point unseen. There was no moon, but the starlight was very penetrating.

Rogers gazed about and agreed, and was on the point of ordering the boats to put back to cover when some belated bateaux came down upon them from the direction of the Point. Passing word for no man to speak but for all to row their best, Rogers stood in the bow of the first boat and calmly awaited the issue.

The two fleets met and some one called out a question. Rogers snarled back in French that he was behind time. Then he turned and bawled out orders and oaths to his men, and the two units drew apart.

This incident deterred Rogers from returning to the brook, but a search of the eastern bank revealed a wealth of overhanging foliage under which he believed they could remain in safety until the following night.

The morning brought acute dangers. Putnam was complaining of too much sleep when the first fleet of boats, laden with supplies for Ticonderoga, passed them. After that throughout the morning men and supplies swept on to the fort.

At midday the rangers took their guns and prepared to fight, discovery seeming inevitable. This because six boats filled with soldiers swung out of line and approached them.

The fifty men kneeled ready to fire if Rogers gave the signal; but just as it seemed as if the enemy proposed grounding their boats at the feet of the scouts the course changed and proceeded some distance above them, where the soldiers landed to cook their dinner. From their white uniforms with violet facings, their black three-cornered hats and black gaiters, the rangers readily identified them as troops of the line. The freshness of their gay attire evidenced their recent arrival from France. To the relief of the rangers these were unaccompanied by either Indian or Canadian allies.

"They'll never find us 'less they stumble on us by mistake," Rogers whispered to Putnam. "And I don't think they'll wander far from their kettles."

"Nor their brandy-kegs. Speaking of kettles, I'm thinking the wind is bringing a pleasant smell from their camp," observed Putnam, sniffing hungrily.

"——! If the men smell that they'll be for raiding them," grunted Rogers.

"Detail me to make a scout. I won't be discovered. If I am I'll make off toward Ticonderoga, steal a canoe and come after you and find you."

"No, no," Rogers refused. "We're after bigger game than a dinner-kettle."

Some of the rangers now straightened and began wrinkling their noses, while their eyes grew wolfish. Rogers read the signs, and urged all to go to sleep.

"Major, my teeth ache from chawing them rations of ours," one of them complained. "Can't we go up there and help ourselves?"

"No, sir," was the stern reply.

The man sank back sullenly. His companions frowned. The odor of cooking meat was almost irresistible. Outdoor life and unusual exertions gave the men ravenous appetites. There was not one of them who would not gladly have risked a pitched battle for the sake of a slab of beef.

"It's ox, too!" groaned a man.

"Better let me go, major," whispered Putnam. "It'll quiet the men, and I won't get caught. If they keep sulky they'll be poor workers when we need them the most."

"All right. Go ahead," Rogers reluctantly consented.

Then to the disgruntled men:

"Cap'n Putnam will scout their camp. I want every man here to lie low and keep his mouth shut."

All signs of sullenness instantly vanished. If any one could procure a portion of the meat it

was Israel Putnam. And with whispered best wishes they watched him steal into the woods back of their hiding-place.

Putnam had no plan thought out. His going was prompted solely by his desire to escape the tedium of doing nothing. The soldiers had bivouacked within easy pistol-shot and were laughing and shouting boisterously and calling for more brandy. No guards were considered necessary, for were they not in the water-lane controlled by France?

Gliding through the ancient growth, Putnam advanced until their voices told him he was directly abreast of them. He began stealing toward the shore when a new note struck his ears, one that caused him to shrink back. It was the guttural voice of an Indian.

He feared that his companions in their contempt for the regulars might indulge in some piece of carelessness which would attract the attention of the red men. Throwing himself flat, he wriggled down the slight slope until he found a peep-hole through the undergrowth.

Six Indians—from the West if their beaver-skin blankets told anything—were fraternizing with the soldiers. They were Ottawas from Michillimackinac, and they had been drinking at Ticonderoga, and they had left there in disgust and anger on being refused more liquor. The soldiers, delighted to play host to their savage allies and unable to perceive their guests were close to the homicidal pitch, kicked forth a keg and, slapping the Indians heartily on the back, invited them to drink.

Their leader, whose face was hideously startling with its stripes of white and yellow and black, produced a tin cup from under his blanket and eagerly filled it and tossed it off.

One of the soldiers, being something of a comedian, made much of this savage and swore that he belonged to the *troupes de terre;* for did he not wear the white and black with yellow facings? The savage grunted under the man's familiarity, but passed his dipper for more.

Another Ottawa, his face painted white except for black areas around his eyes, snatched the dipper and filled it. The first drinker was inclined to resent this act, but was not yet sufficiently primed.

The dipper passed rapidly, and Putnam perceived the devils glaring from the small black eyes, and pitied the soldiers for their ignorance. They were lighting a torch over a barrel of powder and were finding it great sport. As the red men drank, the soldiers kept pace with them.

The liquor reacted differently on the two races. The Indians glared and grimaced as if suffering from convulsions, then gave voice to terrible cries, terminating them abruptly. A warrior would stand rigid for a minute, his eyes distended and fixed, suggesting a suppressed hysteria, then he would all but collapse, screaming like a fiend and striking the air. In another moment he would fall frantically to stabbing his knife into the ground and grunting in a bestial manner.

The effect of repeated drams on the regulars was to incite them to ruder horseplay. They began to view their guests with contempt and to play pranks upon them.

PUTNAM relaxed, as he no longer feared discovery. He began to believe that one of the kettles of meat was to be his spoil.

Suddenly two of the Indians disagreed as to who should next drink from the dipper, and began tearing at each other with their teeth like two wolves. The soldiers rubbed their eyes in amazement at the ferocious spectacle and endeavored to pull the two apart. Instantly the owner of the dipper hurled his ax and brained a soldier.

In the next second Indians and white men were fighting confusedly. The soldiers, while greatly outnumbering the savages, had left their guns in the boats, and began to make for them. Their lack of experience was quickly perceived by the Ottawas, who charged them recklessly. The two combatants ceased their struggle and turned to collecting white scalps.

In rushing back to the boats the soldiers did not keep together, but each man went his own pace, thereby stringing out and weakening their retreat. The six Indians whooped after them, plying knife and ax. The camp-fire was deserted. Putnam dashed from cover, caught up two huge kettles of boiling meat and carried them back into the woods.

Rogers stepped from cover and offered to carry one of the kettles. Putnam shook his head and dumped the meat out on the pine needles, briefly explaining:

"They'll think they ate the meat while drunk. But they'd know they never ate the kettles. Get two men with blankets."

With that he ran back with the kettles and secured two more. These were also emptied upon the ground and then returned to the encampment.

By this time the Indians were being clubbed into submission. They attempted to escape to the woods, but the officer in charge of the regulars was determined that they should be taken to the fort for punishment, and forced them into the boats and placed a guard over them.

Four of the soldiers had been murdered in addition to the one brained by the fire. The tragedy sobered the men, and when they hurried back to the camp to remove the body of their comrade and found the kettles overturned, but with no trace of the meat, they did not tarry to inquire into the phenomenon. Hastily gathering up their belongings, they

repaired to their boats and started for Ticonderoga. Putnam returned to the pine-grove and was in time to assist Rogers and two men in scooping up the meat and carrying it to the rangers.

Boats were now hurrying to the scene of the fight and there was every chance that some of these might blunder upon the rangers. The latter had no intention of being deprived of their fresh rations, and as they stood ready to resent a discovery they eagerly bolted the hot meat. Fortunately the scene of the fight was obvious to the inbound boats; and although several passed within an oar's length of the whale-boats there was but one focal point for French eyes.

"Take it easy," whispered Rogers as boat after boat dashed by.

The men relaxed and ate their stolen meat and winked humorously at Putnam. Now and then one of them would double up and softly smite his leg as he reviewed the joke played on the troops of the line. It was bad enough to be taken in by drunken Indians; but to lose their dinner in broad daylight!

Between nine and ten o'clock that night they took to the boats and rowed by the stone tower of Crown Point—or Fort Frederic as the French called it—unchallenged and unseen. By daylight they were ten miles below the point, hemmed in at the bottom of a magnificent green bowl, with an aquamarine sea at their feet and the horizons built up of the Adirondacks and the Green Mountains. Thus had the lake appeared to Champlain when he gave it his name and precipitated that hate which the Long House was to feel toward his race for a century and a half.

The French and English regulars beholding the beautiful island-dotted sheet of water for the first time must have been deeply impressed. To the rangers it was quite ordinary and commonplace; for once Albany, or the "Western" frontier along the Alleghanies, were left behind its like was frequently found.

This day twoscore bateaux and a schooner passed their hiding-place on the way to Canada; poor game, for it was Ticonderoga-bound boats with their cargoes of supplies that the rangers desired to prey upon. The night was cloudy and with an early start the boats were rowed fifteen miles farther from Crown Point and again laid up. Now Rogers was ready to raid the enemy's shipping.

While the men slept Putnam went ashore and scouted along the lake until he had rounded a heavily wooded point. Beyond the point was a schooner lying at anchor. It was patent she was heavily laden and bound for the foot of the lake. Putnam believed this would be their first prize and lost no time in returning and making his report.

Rogers at once aroused his men and prepared to capture the vessel. Taking the lead with Putnam at his side, he led his little fleet close inshore and along the point.

As he neared the wooded tip he waited for the boats to come up and gave the signal for all to dash around the point and attack the schooner on both sides. The capture would have been easily effected as the lazy crew had no thought of danger and only two men were visible on deck.

As the whale-boats came in sight of the schooner, however, Rogers beheld two sloops coming up the lake and sweeping down on them. To persist in the capture of the schooner would permit the sloops to bear away and carry the alarm to the point.

"After the sloops!" he roared, instantly shifting his plans.

The sloops still came on, not realizing their peril until well within gunshot. Then the spectacle of five whale-boats lustily propelled toward them occasioned first wonder, then fear.

"Fire," yelled Rogers.

The volley of balls stupefied the two small crews for a minute, and the sloops veered and swerved like immense waterfowl fearfully wounded. Even then they might have escaped had they regained their course. Instead of doing this—it was their only chance—the crews promptly dropped small boats and in a panic endeavored to row to the opposite shore.

The pursuit was brief as each whale-boat was being hurled through the water under the impetus of ten pairs of arms. Realizing that flight was useless, the two boats surrendered. The volley had killed three men and wounded two, Rogers was informed by one of the captives.

By this time the crew of the schooner was awake to their danger and was frantically raising sail and endeavoring to stand off. Rogers gazed up and down the lake and beheld a long line of dots, which he knew must be bateaux containing soldiers, and several dipping sails.

With a sigh of regret he gave his orders. Three of the boats with the prisoners put back behind the point. He and Putnam in the two remaining boats overhauled the sloops. These were heavily freighted with food supplies and a considerable quantity of brandy. Saving out a small keg of the liquor for his men, Rogers proceeded to scuttle the craft.

Guns were being fired from the distant bateaux, more to stimulate the courage of the men aboard the schooner than in any hope of injuring the raiders. Rogers leaped into one boat, Putnam into another, and the men gave way with a will. Soon they were behind the point and back to their hiding-place. Rogers broached the keg and allowed his men and the prisoners a ration; then ordered:

"Take the prisoners to Fort William Henry. Swing well west to clear the marsh at the head

of Trout Brook, then bear back to strike the path leading to Sabbath Day Point.

"Send scouts ahead to learn if any of our boats are at the point, and if there are make the rest of the trip by water. But the prisoners must be delivered at the fort. Cap'n Putnam and I will follow."

Then, turning to one of the prisoners, an intelligent-appearing young man, Rogers asked—

"Why are so many soldiers hurrying to Ticonderoga?"

The prisoner shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"You know. The English are about to advance in force. M. de Vaudreuil is rushing all available men from Fort St. Jean."

Rogers repeated this to Putnam, and the latter declared:

"Then the girl's first message got through. She found some one to take it before she reached Fort Edward and learned from Lyman that there was no chance of our attacking in force. By heavens, major, she wasn't the only spy in Albany."

A RANGER was sent to observe what happened beyond the point. By the time the whale-boats were hidden—for Rogers intended to return and make use of them again—the scout returned.

The schooner's crew was striving desperately to work her into the lake and was signaling furiously to the bateaux. The sloops were bearing down on her, and there was much firing of guns to attract the attention of all distant craft.

The partizan leader hesitated. Even now, he was confident, it would be possible to capture and destroy the schooner.

But if the destruction of the schooner entailed loss of life among his rangers he would be making a poor exchange. Schooners could be turned out rapidly, but it took time to make a ranger.

"Swing your packs!" he ordered; and the rangers with their prisoners filed into the silent forest.

Satisfying himself that the boats were effectually concealed, Rogers paused only long enough to bury the keg of brandy and then with Putnam at his heels struck off up the lake, keeping close to the shore. Toward night they came upon a birch canoe and hid near it until dark, then took to the water and silently paddled up the lake. Their strenuous efforts advanced them to within a few miles of Crown Point by the time the sun drove them to cover.

That day they lay close, spending much of the time in sleeping and seeking to forget their ravenous hunger. During the late afternoon they watched numerous boats make back and forth in search of the mysterious raiders. But so long as they watched they saw nothing to indicate that the five whale-boats had been found.

"It's puzzling the Frenchmen like sin," chuckled Rogers as they prepared to depart. "They can't understand where the pirates come from."

The next leg of their journey was to be on foot, their need of food sending them forth before it was fairly dark. The enemy, however, never dreamed of the foe lingering so far north of Ticonderoga, and the two adventurers swung along briskly over a well-beaten trail.

Soldiers were occasionaly coming and going, also frequent bands of Indians. Avoiding these without much difficulty, they covered something better than ten miles, or until they were within dangerous proximity of Ticonderoga.

Once they came near being discovered. Because of the darkness and their growing confidence, coupled to their keen desire to find some habitation where they could secure food, they held on their way too boldly and unexpectedly came upon a small band of Indians camped at one side of the trail.

Rogers gave Putnam a warning with his elbow and began jabbering in French. Neither paid any heed to the savages.

An Indian called out for them to join them. Rogers waved his hand and held to the path. Two of the savages jumped to their feet as if intending to run after them and bring them back, but thought better of it and dropped back by the fire.

"Just luck," murmured Rogers. "If they'd been French Mohawks instead of big-lake Indians they'd have spotted us at once."

"Saved them two scalps," Putnam grimly replied. "If those two had come after us there would 'a' been two less of the devils."

Near midnight they halted at the foot of a low, wooded hill. At the base on the opposite side of this was located one of the French advanced posts.

Skirting the hill on the west side so as to keep clear of the outpost and planning to make the outlet of Lake George, they swung too far aside and before they knew it were blundering close to several camp-fires. This they knew must be a temporary camp of soldiers.

Recovering their assurance as no alarm was given, they decided to approach nearer. Where there were soldiers there must be food. They crawled on their hands and knees side by side, watching out for the sentinels.

Neither remembered that the French, unlike the English, posted their sentinels well outside the range of their fires. And so it was with much dismay, and while they were yet some distance from the fires, that they heard a sharp *"Qui vive?"* hurled at them from behind. Both rolled in the same direction and fell into a clay pit, Putnam being underneath.

Out of the darkness came the flash of a gun.

Clambering from the pit and while seemingly surrounded by shouting voices, they retreated until Rogers fell over a log. Putnam dropped beside him.

They waited to get their bearings. The camp was in confusion, various orders being shouted with the men racing frantically back and forth.

"Bah! The fools don't know even now what fussed them out," said Rogers with contempt.

"That's an Indian yell. We must be going. They've called in their Huron scouts," warned Putnam.

Knowing that the search would be pushed toward the lake, the rangers doubled back to the western base of the hill. Had it not been for their gnawing hunger they would have ascended this and found a hiding-place where they might sleep, and whence they might reconnoiter the fort in the morning.

But the demands of the stomach made them savagely indifferent to risks, and, agreeing that boldness might result in food, they rounded the hill and made straight for the advanced post. Putnam, who was in the lead, frequently stopped low to bring objects against the skyline.

Finally he announced—

"There's a cabin or something directly ahead."

"Cabin. Canadians who work in the sawmill near here use it. Climb up the slope a bit and we'll see the lights of the outpost."

They ascended the rising ground until they could behold the camp-fire of the enemy behind the barricade of logs and earth. The cabin was half-way between them and the post. Both eyed the dark, squat mass of logs hungrily.

"Men live there. There must be food there," muttered Putnam, licking his lips.

"And food we must have or we can't climb the mountain tomorrow and see how many men are in Ticonderoga," Rogers declared.

Without another word both worked down to the foot of the slope and stole toward the cabin. Stalking the low structure as if it had been some wild animal asleep, they drew very close.

There was no suggestion of light about the place, and Rogers whispered his belief that the men were back at the post enjoying the society and brandy of the soldiers. They reached one end of the cabin and Putnam peered in through the small opening that answered for a window.

The moment he did this his nostrils dilated. A pleasant aroma came from the fireplace, where a dull glow marked the bed of coals. Turning to Rogers, he exulted:

"Empty. No dog to bother us. And something cooking in the fireplace!"

"I could smell it," hissed Rogers.

Passing to the door, Rogers stood on guard while Putnam entered. Now the Connecticut man could identify the seductive aroma as emanating from a kettle of beans stewing in company with generous chunks of pork. Darting to the fireplace, he swung the kettle from the crane and started for the door. Rogers sprang inside and collided with him.

"Two men coming," he warned. "Kill or capture."

Putnam set the kettle on the dirt floor and drew his ax and took a position beside the door. Rogers stood behind him, likewise ready. The two men were loitering and talking carelessly. Over Putnam's shoulder Rogers whispered:

"French officers returning to the advanced post. Been to learn the cause of the rumpus at the camp." A pause; then he continued:

"One says it must have been an Indian trying to steal some brandy. T'other's cursing the Indians as more nuisance than help."

The officers were now very close, and Putnam's blood tingled at the thought of capturing one or both of them right in the shadow of Ticonderoga. The voices sounded just outside the door as the two men halted. The rangers believed they were about to enter, but as they made no move to do so Putnam whispered:

"Call out in French that you're sick. Ask them to come in. We'll bag the two."

Rogers tapped his shoulder in assent, and just as the officers were on the point of resuming their stroll he groaned dismally and faintly cried:

"Help, *messieurs!* For the love of our Lady! A dying man calls you!"

"*Mordieu!*" cried one. "That scamp François says he is sick. He was well enough this morning."

Rogers groaned. The officer who had just spoken started forward to investigate, but his friend pulled him back, protesting:

"What would you, Rigaud? The pig must have smallpox!"

With a squeal of fear the impetuous one fell back and the two began a rapid retreat. Putnam clicked his teeth in rage and snarled:

"We must catch them. I'll race you to them."

He sprang lightly through the door with Rogers at his heels. The officers were some rods away and walking rapidly to escape possible contagion. Rogers touched Putnam's hand as a signal to advance when a new voice burst through the darkness, bawling indecencies set to rime. Putnam halted. Rogers bumped into him and swore under his breath.

The officers seemed electrified by the boisterous, drunken voice and sharply called out:

"Hola! François?"

"*Oui, m'sieu!*"

Rogers turned and pulled Putnam back, whispering:

"It's the man who lives in the cabin—the man I pretended to be. Ah! Now the officers are calling for the soldiers to come and investigate. Run!"

"Not till I get the beans," was the grim reply.

THE officers were now sharply issuing orders. The sound of clumping feet marked the coming of the soldiers. The drunken Canadian was in the lead and breathing a hideous vengeance on the trespassers. Putnam emerged from the cabin just as Rogers felled a man with the butt of his gun.

The night was too dark to distinguish individuals, but the rangers made out a solid mass of humanity striving to locate them, while the yells and curses of the soldiers blundering into each other and receiving and giving blows resulted in cries of encouragement from the post. Rogers swung his gun as a club, striking at random. Putnam swung the big kettle in a circle at arm's length and mowed down half a dozen bewildered assailants.

Falling back, the two gained the end of the cabin and made up the wooded slope. Behind them continued the voices of the infuriated men and the sound of blows and the shrill commands of the officers.

"They don't know that we're gone," chuckled Rogers. "Fighting among themselves!"

"They'll know soon. Look!"

And Putnam pointed toward the post. Torches were being brought up on the run. A quavering, ululating cry now rose above the chorus of profanity.

The situation no longer appealed to the rangers as being humorous, and they stiffened their nerves against a real peril. For the cry was the hunting-call of the Caughnawaga Mohawks.

"So many feet, so much trampling about, they'll be slow to pick up our trail," murmured Rogers.

"I won't feel easy till we get these beans inside us," grumbled Putnam.

They pushed on up the hill, taking comfort in the thought that the Mohawks would seek them near the lake. The confusion below them died out and a shoulder of the elevation shut off their view of the post camp-fire. Lessening his efforts, Rogers led the way over pine needles.

At last he halted and pawed about with the muzzle of his gun. With a sigh of relief he sank to the ground, saying:

"Knew I could find it blindfolded. Ledge behind us with a hole in it. Good place to hide."

"Now let's eat," said Putnam, pushing the kettle between them although unable to see his friend.

Their fumbling hands were soon dipping into the kettle, and for several minutes they bolted beans and pieces of pork. Then Rogers informed the other:

"I couldn't tell you in the cabin, but the officers said things that showed the Lidindick girl got her first message through just as you said. The three thousand men left under Levis when Montcalm went to take Oswego is being increased to five thousand men. It's being done with a rush, showing the French fear an attack in force."

"Unless we stiffen up in spirit they can sweep Winslow back to Fort Edward and then roll Winslow and Lyman back to Albany," groaned Putnam. "And I thought it would help to let such talk get through!"

"Don't blame yourself so hard. Vaudreuil was bound to send reenforcements to Ticonderoga once Oswego was taken. But he'd have taken his time about it if it were not for the girl's message."

"But there's something even more interesting if I read the officers' talk right. It seems the French won't advance against Fort William Henry until they get a special word from the girl—some word she has promised to send, some word they're waiting for."

"That's the word we found on the dead warrior, telling them to strike now and capture forts William Henry and Edward!" exclaimed Putnam. "When she sees no advance is being made she'll guess it failed to get through. She'll try to repeat it. We've stayed round here too long. The girl is the danger-point. She must be stopped from sending any more information."

"Yes, she must be stopped," sighed Rogers. "I knew her father—and liked him. But she gets too dangerous. I'm ready to start any time."

CHAPTER VII

THROUGH THE LINES

ONCE Ephraim Willis arrived in Albany he regretted coming. His leg bothered him, but not sufficiently to prevent his taking to the bush. Captain Putnam's orders had directed him to proceed to Fort Edward or Albany. He would have been obeying the letter of his instructions had he turned about after reaching the fort and made off into the forest.

That had been his intention. But on reaching Fort Edward he was sadly pestered by all the officers, from General Lyman down, for news of the enemy, and only the fiction that he was on a mission of secret service in Albany had afforded an avenue of escape.

Fort Edward with its overwhelming masculine atmosphere was no place for one in love and impelled to brood over a tantalizing and disloyal Elizabeth. On starting for Albany his mood had improved, for it seemed as if memories were drawing him there. He proposed remaining a day or so, and then scouting back to join Putnam in the neighborhood of Fort William Henry, giving the inquisitive staff at Edward a wide berth.

During the journey, however, he found the opportunity to review his experience with the

girl, which had been denied him under the constant cross-examination of Lyman and his officers; and the retrospection revealed nothing but dead ashes. He was sorry to be there. He now realized she could not change her nature. He was nothing but an uncouth woodsman to her, and his abrupt surrender to her charms could only amuse her.

He found the hill town seething with activity and excitement. The most absurd rumors were being passed along the street; so grotesque that Willis would not bother to deny them unless asked pointblank.

The Three Fires, or the league composed of the Chippewa, Ottawa and Potawatomi, were sending their entire warrior force to participate in a last drive against the English. Albany was doomed to capture and sack. Schenectady might fall any hour.

Loudoun's ten thousand men were strung all the way from the Hudson to Lake George, and by coming down the Mohawk River the Western hordes would cut this line in two rolling one demoralized fragment back on the Hudson, while a superior force from Ticonderoga would nail down by the head at Fort William Henry the remainder of the troops.

The Iroquois were so strongly impressed by the fall of Oswego, following on the defeat of Braddock, that they would offer no assistance. These and similar rumors were frantically repeated and for the most part believed by the civilians.

Naturally the citizens of the town clamored for more adequate defenses and the withholding of sufficient troops to protect the place. This panic did not permeate the army, however, and regulars and provincials with much purring of drums marched in and out, followed by artillery.

With a slight limp in his walk Willis repaired to a tap-room and called for a mug of cider. A boisterous group filled the place, the flushed faces of untried rustics accentuating the leathern visages of men made old at the game by twelve months' experience. The red and blue uniforms were worn and stained, and the men in homespun sought to give themselves an air of military smartness through the medium of boastful speech. Could the tap-room threats have been transmuted into military efficacy Louis the Fifteenth would have lost his throne forthwith.

Willis heard the fiery speeches with lips curled in disgust. He knew these loiterers and braggarts formed an infinitesimal percentage of the army, yet it angered him exceedingly that they could not be sent to the front lines.

"Our chaplain preached that we should love our enemies," guffawed one raw recruit who had yet to hear a gun fired in battle. "Just wait till old Kill-Sure gits a line on 'em!"

And he patted his firelock.

"Wait till they get you trussed up to a stake and nicely barbecued," broke in Willis, his quarrel with the world in general driving him to criticize those bits of braggadocio he was usually pleased to accept as being humorous. The young man stared at him with startled eyes. Another, a swaggering, muscular chap, lowered his mug with a thump and turned to glare balefully.

"Who might you be to be telling his Majesty's soldiers that they'll be barbecued?" he demanded. "—— me, but your loyalty'll be the better for your giving a cheer for King George."

"—— your ignorant hides," growled Willis. "I've fought for King George. I've dodged death a hundred times for King George, and I'll do it as many times more if I'm lucky; but there ain't anything in my line of duty that calls me to yowl hoorays for King George every time a crowd of tavern loungers take the notion to tell me to. If you folks be so bloodthirsty to slaughter the French and their Indians why ain't you out where there's plenty of fighting?"

"Babble, bibble! By the same word why ain't you there instead of being here swilling cider?" challenged the other, sweeping his mug aside and leaning his gun against the wall where it would be out of his way should he decide to leave the table hurriedly.

"I've been there, sir. I'll be there again as soon as a hole in my leg mends. I was there on the Ohio. I was there on the Monongahela. I've already been at Lake George; and next time I'm going right through to Montreal. Now, you blood-drinker, go out and show you can do something besides killing New England rum."

The speech had been softly uttered, and until the derisive close the company believed that the ranger was anxious to avoid trouble. The conclusion left them silent for a second; then rose a hum of anger. The man addressed choked over a suitably violent retort and struggled to his feet. A voice from the back of the low room called out—

"I guess he's a spy!"

"That's it! Spy! Spy!" yelled several.

The soldier who had demanded a cheer for the king rushed round the table and fell upon Willis, crying—

"I've got him, fellers!"

The table crashed over. Willis was knocked from his stool. He landed on his back, his assailant on top of him trying to choke him. With a grunt of rage the ranger raised his pewter mug and brought it against the man's head, and then threw the limp form aside and leaped to his feet before the onlookers could take any action against him.

It was not until he was making for his long rifle that the mob came to its senses and advanced to seize him. Sweeping up the overturned stool, he threw it, knocking down two men and driving the others back. He followed up the stool with the table. The crowd began to reply with bottles and mugs, one missile

knocking off his hat and another striking him on the chest.

With a roar of unbridled fury he grabbed up his rifle and cracked a man over the head with the barrel, and then swept the muzzle back and forth, warning:

"You don't have to go to Lake George to get shot. You'll get it right here in another second."

"And I'll lend him a ball or two," cried a lusty voice from the doorway; and a soldier in scarlet uniform and wearing a silver-laced hat forced his way to the ranger's side.

"One of the Jersey Blues!" some one exclaimed.

"Right! A man who loves fair play. I'm Sergeant Enoch Champers of the Fiftieth, Shirley's old regiment. Now fetch on your trouble."

THE men wavered and sullenly drew back. The sergeant made a very martial figure as he stood beside the ranger, a long pistol in his hand. The Jersey Blues although made up of provincials were paid by the king and rated as regulars.

The year before they had made the futile Oswego campaign under Shirley. They had worn their flashy uniforms awkwardly enough at the first and had powdered their hair or wigs once a week under protest. A year's experience had turned them out smart and trim. Their status was undeniably above that of many provincial troops.

The lace on the sergeant's hat was worth several dollars. He was issued two pairs of good shoes and two pairs of fine worsted stockings in addition to his gallant uniform. All this when many soldiers were fighting in the clothes they wore from home. He could hold up his head in the presence of a provincial lieutenant.

"He wouldn't give a cheer for the king," protested the young man whose bombast had precipitated the trouble.

"It isn't for you to tell him when to cheer," replied the sergeant, cocking his hat and standing with feet apart and hands on his hips, the long pistol held carelessly. "Can't you see he is one of Rogers' Rangers? Can't you see he has been wounded?

"While you've been guzzling ale and telling what you'd do he's been fighting and getting hurt. The cheers his gracious Majesty wants aren't shouted in boozing-kens."

The man who had been cracked over the head with the mug and who from his reclining position had listened to the sergeant's words now crawled to his feet and frankly admitted:

"It was the drink that made a hot-headed fool of me. Hope I didn't do any hurt to your leg, mister."

Ashamed to have permitted himself to be dragged into a brawl, Willis readily accepted the apology and offered to buy cider for the company. His late assailant objected, saying:

"We've had more'n enough, and it's high time we was proving we can fight as hard as we drink. Come on, lads."

The men trooped out, leaving Willis and the sergeant alone. Willis hastily said:

"I'm much obliged to you. I was wrong to notice them. But things haven't gone well with me lately, and I've got as finicky as a sick cat."

"Things must have gone very much wrong when they can make one of Rogers' Rangers talk like that," said the sergeant soothingly.

"You're well spoken," remarked Willis. "You're a scholar."

"Oh, nothing like that. Just fond of books. I'm Maryland born and bred. Maryland didn't seem to be sending the men up here that she should, so I joined the Jersey Blues. If it hadn't been for this trouble I should have kept on at Yale College."

"You've been there, then? Then you must know General Phineas Lyman at Fort Edward, who was tutor there."

"Very well indeed. But how did you get wounded? French Mohawk or Western Indian?"

"Neither. I feel ashamed at sailing under false colors."

And Willis briefly related his encounter with young Brant. In finishing he said:

"It's really all right now. I shall go back to the bush in another day."

"I'm to go up to the lake. We'll meet there, I hope. I suppose the Oswego affair has dampened the men's courage a bit. Seems to have frightened the town here."

"Not the rangers," Willis quickly replied. "We still know the only way to lick the French is to go after them. We could have whipped them last year and taken Ticonderoga after Dieskau was captured, but we didn't."

"Hindsight is always better than foresight," said the sergeant.

"I'm not criticizing Sir William Johnson any. He's the best man to handle the Iroquois we ever had. It isn't his fault that he'd had no experience in war when Shirley picked him to lead. We won something as it was. We captured Dieskau and sent his men flying. Will you have a mug of cider?"

"No, thank you. I must be going to look after some stragglers. I thought some of my men were in here. Some of the provincial troops were telling in here last night that General Wilson had been ordered to fall back and join General Lyman at Fort Edward."

"Fool's talk. I was at Edward yesterday. Nothing of the kind has happened and won't unless our commanders go crazy. Why, we can drive the French out of old Ti any time we go after them in earnest. Their militia won't

fight except in the bush. They can't manage their savages. Once they hear our big guns they'll start for the St. Lawrence."

"But some of your fellow rangers say the French have some stiff defenses at the foot of the lake."

"Just entrenchments and the usual abatis. Of course they have defenses, but a few hours' play with our artillery would make an opening."

"Of course, of course. I lost last season's fun by taking the Oswego march. I was with Shirley when he heard his son was killed at Braddock's side. Left me pretty green about this section of the country. Well, best of luck."

"I don't feel I've thanked you for the hearty way you joined me," warmly declared Willis. "But I guess you know how I feel about it. I shall look for you up Fort William Henry way."

With a hearty handshake they parted, and the sergeant's brave figure became lost in the streams of soldiers. Willis remained and bitterly arraigned himself for the day's adventure.

"Why stay here even a night?" he mused, at last rising and limping into the street. "I was a fool to come. —— that tavern fracas! It's given a wrench to my leg that'll put me back a day."

He wandered down the hill and sunned himself for an hour where he could watch the bustle and confusion of departing troops. Moving along the river-bank, he paused to wonder at the arrangement of sloops and bateaux strung across the Hudson above the town.

The sloops were anchored in line in the middle of the river. On each side bateaux were kept abreast of them. A citizen pointed them out to a neighbor and excitedly cried that they were there to stop an enemy flotilla from descending the river to attack the town. Willis smiled in quiet amusement. But at that he had no idea why the boats were strung across the river.

LATE in the afternoon he discovered that he was hungry and set about procuring some food. After eating he leisurely ascended the hill street to the town-house, and, repairing to headquarters, identified himself and offered to carry any dispatches to Forts Edward or William Henry.

The lieutenant on duty in the outer room eyed him sharply, then smiled and stretched forth a cordial hand.

"I remember you now; Ephraim Willis of Connecticut. Saw you with Putnam. Lucky I can vouch for you, or you might be detained.

"Wait a minute and I'll fix you out."

He entered another room, and as the heavy door swung open the clink of glasses and loud talk could be heard. Willis was slightly puzzled by the officer's words, but took it for granted he had referred to dispatches. Finally he emerged and winked an eye and jerked his head back as he closed the door.

"Suspicious as ——," he chuckled. "Had to pledge my word that you are what you claim to be. But I got it."

And he handed out a pass which stated that the bearer, Ephraim Willis, was to be allowed to leave town at any hour.

Willis blinked and reread it.

"Leave the town at any hour! God's mercy! Does any one want to keep me here?"

"The town's sealed up for the next twenty-four hours, perhaps longer. All depends on the finding of a certain paper," whispered the lieutenant. "We've even thrown boats across the river above and below the town. No chance for a man to get out of Albany tonight unless he goes with troops, and each commander is held responsible for the men under him."

"The ——! Some one stole a valuable paper? Do they know who did it?"

The lieutenant glanced toward the closed door and murmured:

"Any friend of Captain Putnam's must be a stanch man. The paper is very important if it reaches Montcalm. Gives the details of our strength and location of the troops and guns. Of course the French know in round numbers what we've got, thanks to spies, but they don't know how the army's placed. We've moved lots of men back and forth just to blind them—the spies."

"But you must have some idea who took the paper. Who had a chance?"

"That's the mystery. It was on a certain officer's desk. He was called to the door for a few moments to receive an order from his superior's orderly. When he turned back the paper was gone. They're examining him now—just wasting time. He's told all he knows, but they're still baiting him."

"I hope they get it back," sighed Willis. "If they won't take old Ti they ought to keep a good grip on their papers. Much obliged for the pass, lieutenant, but between you and me I can quit this town with a drove of cattle at almost any hour and not be stopped."

The officer laughed and agreed:

"One of Roberts' Rangers can do wonderful things, I admit. But perhaps the pass will make it easier. When you see old Wolf Putnam remember me to him. My name is Watkins. Rhode Island man."

Warmly appreciative of his courtesy, Willis returned to wander the streets until he should make up his mind whether to sleep in town or find a bed in the bush. He began to doubt the wisdom of leaving town that night, as the scuffle in the tavern had lamed his wounded leg.

He mounted the hill to the fort and watched the two lines of boats fade from view beneath

the gathering darkness, only to reassert their presence by bobbing lights. From the lower town came the murmur of busy life, punctuated by the occasional rumble of gun-carriages. Somewhere in the town was the spy and the stolen paper; or had the spy escaped before the guards could be set?

"Likely enough he got away before any order was given," muttered Willis. "Once he got his paw on that paper he wouldn't stay round here. Yet there must have been some plan, some idea that there was such a paper. He had to know where it was and be ready to pounce on it the minute the officer turned his back. Well, wish I could get a chance to grab some of old Montcalm's papers."

He rose and started down the street. The night was bright under the starlight, and once more the fancy obssessed him that the sharp-roofed houses were so many witches. Finding his leg tiring, he seated himself under a shade-tree and wondered where the girl was this night. In Ticonderoga? In Montreal? With a start he swept his gaze over the broad street and discovered he was in the neighborhood of the Lidindick house. At first he could not decide whether he was above or below it.

"Trifle above it," he decided, taking his bearings by the lighted town-house. "Didn't suppose I'd ever want to see it again. Lord, how she dressed me down!"

He writhed in mortification at his thoughts and fought against his inclination to view the place again. And she so wild and incomprehensible! In what did she charm him? He had seen other women in New York and Philadelphia who were much more beautiful than she. In truth, she always reminded him of a boy, and this was not because his first glimpse of her was when she was masquerading in breeches.

Yet no other woman had interested him. In a conventional fashion he always had supposed that some time he would select a Connecticut girl and settle down near his people. That would be their wish; mate with some one they knew and understood. But this flighty, incorrigible maid, who repulsed him, then lured him on; who had been soft and lovable with him and in the next moment had taunted and flouted him.

"It's because she's so different from me, so different from the women I've always known," he groaned. "That must be it. It's because I could never tell what she would be up to next —soft or with her claws out.

"God help me, a poor fool! I can't help loving her. But I can keep away from that house and everything that reminds me of her. At least I can do that."

Curiously enough this was one of the very things he could not do. The dead house attracted and drew him although he knew the sight of it would only put a new edge on his misery.

Reason told him he was absurd. He had seen her that one night in New York. He had seen her twice in Albany. Her conduct was most questionable.

His New England Puritanism had been weakened none by his experience as an Indian-fighter. Putnam had spoken to his common sense in saying she was not the kind of a girl for him to marry. She was his antithesis. He had been brought up to believe that harmony could never be built up out of contradictions.

And still that unconquerable and unreasonable thing called love gripped his soul, and he knew he could never escape its thrall. And he rose and sought the house.

There were no red lights to advertise it this night. He halted and stared at the darkened windows. He trespassed on the little green and placed a foot where he had found her cloak on the night of her flight. The house had died with its master, Jan the Rogue. This somber thought appealed to his mood. More the pity his love had not died that night——

THE noise made by the door-latch would have been imperceptible to ears untrained to catch the minutiæ of sound. It startled him more than would the explosion of all of Lord Loudoun's cannon.

Could the Rogue's ghost be back in the house? Only ghosts had no need to lift latches. He felt swept with fire as he stole toward the door and halted at the edge of the porch. His heart, which always beat evenly in a forest foray, began pounding like a smithy's sledge.

He could swear the door was slowly opening. The porch shut out the starlight and his eyes were of no use. Yet he was positive he sensed a motion in the door. He believed he could feel it opening.

With a light bound, and entirely forgetting his wounded leg, he was across the porch. The latch clicked harshly. As he lifted it and pulled he heard the tardy rasping of a bolt.

With a yank he threw the door open and sprang inside, one hand holding the rifle, the other flung out ahead of him. The butt of his rifle smashed against some article of furniture.

There sounded a faint patter of feet, and her presence filled the room with a wonderful fragrance.

"Elizabeth!" he whispered, yet so softly that the sound did not pass beyond his lips.

The stairs betrayed her, and he was bounding upward in pursuit. There would be a back exit of course, but he trusted himself to keep so close that she could not gain it without being caught. At the head of the garret stairs he was confused for a moment; then a board squeaked and he glided to a door and through it and bumped his head against a beam.

Unconscious of the bruise, he followed the telltale squeak of the warped boards until he knew he must be at the end of the garret. Then directly ahead of him he heard her.

He advanced confidently and found himself between two high walls of discarded furnishings, the general miscellany of a garret. She had taken refuge in a cul-de-sac, and he opened his arms wide.

A low, mocking laugh, and the entire mass of heaped-up relics and heirlooms came crashing down upon him. She had lured him there and from the opposite side of the mass had pushed it upon him. Again her low laughter, and with a mighty heave of his strong shoulders he tossed the odds and ends aside and plunged through the débris and after her.

She laughed no more, as the pursuit was renewed more quickly than she had dreamed could be possible. As she went through the door she slammed it behind her, the panels smashing against his nose.

With a drive of his rifle-butt he sent the door flying open and gained the head of the stairs. She was decending on the run and had no time to practise stealth.

He leaped recklessly, clearing neatly the whole flight. His heel caught on a tread, precipitating him headlong, his rifle flying to one side. He would have collided with her had she not turned at right angles; as it was his pawing hands stripped loose her long cloak.

He got to his knees when he was seized in a powerful grasp. This was no maid who sought his throat. Striking the savage hands apart, he came to his feet and closed in on the unknown. They were about equally matched, but the ranger was mad to discover the girl and the man together.

With an oath and wrench he flung the man about. They struck a door that readily gave way, and were in a small apartment lighted by a single candle.

Skilled in the ferocious border style of wrestling, Willis had the man on his hands and knees the moment they went through the doorway. Grunting viciously, he began to draw the man's arm up behind his back, and for the first time noticed the brilliant scarlet uniform. With his left hand he clawed into the fellow's forehead and yanked back his head and got a glimpse of his features.

"Good ——! Sergeant Champers! Jersey Blues. ——!"

With a worrying sound like a wildcat tormenting his prey he might have killed his man with his bare hands had not the fellow managed to yell out:

"Help! For France!"

"I'll help you, you —— spy," growled Willis, grabbing for his windpipe and tearing open the coat.

A folded paper fell out and he caught it up and thrust it inside his coat, at the same time using his own head as a ram and jamming the fellow's face into the floor.

"Help! For France!" gasped the spy.

There was a movement behind Willis, but before he could turn his head he received a blow that sent the world dark for a second.

"Come! There are men at the front door," warned the girl's voice, sounding far off.

"—— Let me breathe!" choked the spy, staggering to his feet and clawing at his throat.

"The back door or we're caught. This soldier— Why, he's no soldier!"

With a little scream she dropped beside him. Although half-stunned Willis was conscious of her presence. He felt a slim, firm hand slip under his neck, then a round arm was cradling his head.

The spy must have extinguished the light, for Willis could not see her, although he opened his eyes. His lips formed her name, but he could not tell whether he spoke aloud or not. But unless his ears were playing him tricks she was whispering:

"Dear lad! Poor lad!"

And for a heavenly moment his head rested against her breast and soft lips were touching his thin cheek.

He struggled to a sitting posture and threw out his arms to find her and saw faces staring at him through the doorway. As his wits returned he saw these were citizens.

"What is the matter with you? What are you doing in the house of Jan the Rogue?" suspiciously demanded a man.

Willis got to his feet and looked about him. By the light of the tiny candle he observed he was in a small room which had no windows, and decided it had been the secret den of Jan Lidindick, who had had no intention of being spied upon.

Besides the door through which the neighbors were watching him there was another at the back of the small compartment. He threw it open and a current of fresh night air soothed his hot head.

"Who are you? Why are you here in the house of a dead man?" repeated a citizen.

"Softly, softly, friend," mumbled Willis. "The devil's to pay."

With this blind avowal he staggered toward the group, which fell back, intimidated by his bruised and bleeding countenance and wild gaze. Ignoring them, he found his rifle at the foot of the stairs and without any further explanation passed out of the front door.

His brain still throbbed with the marvel of it all, and his one desire was to find her again and make sure his brief Elysian experience was real and not a prank of his befuddled senses. Next his sturdy common sense began arranging the whole scene of the adventure and refused

to allow the delectable maid's compassion to blot out the rest of the picture.

This orderly view of the amazing situation opened the door for jealousy and rage. The house had been made a rendezvous between the girl and Sergeant Champers, *alias* French Spy. They had met there by arrangement; they had fled together. At the desperate pleading of the man she had struck him down from behind.

True, he did not believe she knew whom she was assaulting, but her readiness and courage to strike the blow evidenced how closely the two had linked their interests together. Still he could have forgiven the blow—that was nothing—if only Champers, or whoever he was hadn't presented such an attractive figure in his scarlet uniform and silver-laced hat.

"But she knows his good looks were in for a spoiling if she hadn't given me that clout over the head," he told himself as he sped down the street, seeking the fugitives. "If I'd only 'a' known! I'll see him swing yet. He must 'a' stole the paper through the window when the officer was at the door."

Out of this galling misery one fact stood bedazzling. Jan the Rogue's girl had kissed him; and a few days before she had scorned him when he but touched her hand.

All this was very bewildering to the ranger's honest and simple mind. It savored of enchantment. How many maids were there in her small person? Was it the real maid who took his head in her arms and mothered him?

HE HAD started down the hill instinctively. The two would most surely endeavor to escape from the town. As he neared the river street he turned to search the northern limits of the town, where he believed the fugitives would essay to run the guard.

Ahead of him some roisterers were entering a drinking-den, and the outpouring light for a moment revealed a figure flitting along under the trees, a slim form that seemed to be enveloped in a long, dark cloak. Astounded at his rare fortune, Willis quickened his gait, running noiselessly on his toes and keeping on the alert against a surprize attack by the girl's companion.

Drawing close to his quarry, he leaped like a cat and his long brown fingers were clutching an arm. Instantly his captive wheeled and lunged at him viciously and as luck ruled the knife struck the barrel of the rifle, emitting sparks.

"You'd kill me?" he sorrowfully asked, retaining his hold on the slim wrist.

"I think I shall some time," was the angry retort.

"—— my kidneys! Young Brant!" roared Willis.

"Joseph Brant of the Mohawks," was the haughty correction. "Let go my hand."

Willis released him and demanded—

"Where is Elizabeth Lidindick?"

"How should I know?"

"You are wearing her cloak."

"You have eyes like a weasel. Ask the cloak. Perhaps it can tell you," snarled the boy.

"Enough of blind words, Joseph Brant. Either tell me or say you won't. I'm on the king's business. The girl and a Frenchman, a French spy, just escaped from me up the hill——"

"A Frenchman!" exclaimed the boy. "The girl tricked me! She wanted to come here and get something from her father's house. I was to wait at the Van Woerts' farm. I waited two days. She did not come. Then I came to find her.

"This Frenchman? Shall I know him for that when I see him? The girl shall not be harmed, but the Mohawks shall dance on the Frenchman's roasted body."

"He is dressed in a scarlet uniform. He pretends to be a sergeant of the Jersey Blues. He speaks perfect English," informed the ranger.

"We'll make him whine in French before we finish killing him," boasted the boy, drawing away.

"Wait. How came you by her cloak?"

"She left it with me at the farm. I trusted her and she has fooled me. But her Frenchman shall pay for it."

Willis gritted his teeth over the boy's characterization.

"Her Frenchman!"

He hoped the Mohawks would get him. They were still clamoring for victims to cover the bones of Hendrick and others of their chiefs killed in the war.

"Yes, let him roast—roast slow," he muttered.

Then to the boy—

"He must not get through to Ticonderoga."

"Talking with you won't find him," the boy reminded him.

With that he darted away with the lightness of a leaf blown by the wind. The ranger ran after him and for several rods kept at his heels; then called out:

"The town is closed. No one can leave it without a pass."

Young Brant laughed mockingly, and out of sheer deviltry raised the terrible scalp-cry of the Mohawks and vanished in the darkness.

The cry, and the public's taut state of nerves, brought soldiers pounding down the street and sent straggling householders scurrying to cover. For half an hour it was persistently believed by many that the Caughnawaga Iroquois had stolen into Albany. Firés were built in the street; watchman were sent up and down to proclaim all was well.

Effacing himself to escape the necessity of answering many questions, Willis found himself near headquarters. Here a big bonfire was burning, and by its light he examined the paper he had taken from the bogus sergeant. The first glance told him it was a list of the English forces, together with the details of their distribution. Hurrying to the friendly lieutenant, he handed over the paper and explained:

"Had a fight with a man who calls himself Sergeant Enoch Champers, Fiftieth Regiment, Jersey Blues. He is a French spy. Took the paper from him. He escaped. Is it the missing paper?"

"——! It's the full list! I must report this and send out an alarm for the spy! Wait for me."

Impatiently the ranger waited while the lieutenant repaired to the inner room. In a few moments he came out, saying:

"Chief isn't in. I must find him. His orderly says this is a copy of the stolen paper. Looks like a woman's writing. The original is still missing."

"Then I'm off after the original," cried Willis, bounding away.

He hoped to overtake the girl as she would surely travel north; and he had no desire to be detained in town for several days to be officially cross-examined.

He was wrathfully picturing the girl and man fleeing through the forests together when he was brought to his senses by the loud command —

"Halt!"

At first he was unable to comprehend the challenge, so deeply were his thoughts concentrated on the girl. Then the darkness was lighted by the flare of a pine torch and he found himself surrounded by soldiers. He rapidly gave his name and produced his pass.

"Rogers' Rangers are doing keen work," enviously remarked one of the guards. "I've heard of you. They say you were with Braddock."

"It so happened. Who else has passed here within the last hour?"

"Another, a ranger, a young fellow. You'll probably overtake him, as he will camp along the river."

"He had a pass?"

"Not a written one. But Sergeant Enoch Champers, of the Jersey Blues, spoke for him. Of course a pass is only a form where those serving the king are concerned."

"You have done well, young man," bitterly upbraided Willis. "You have let two spies get by right under your nose. Your Sergeant Champers is a French spy, and he carries information to the French which will be disastrous to the colonies."

"Oh, my ——! But how was I to know?" groaned the corporal in charge of the guard.

Willis remembered his own friendly chat with the plausible Champers and his own lack of suspicion.

"He has fooled better men than you. It isn't for me to blame you," he said.

"Curse his pelt!" moaned the corporal. "Just let him come again! Who's the young rip with him?"

"That I can't tell you," hastily answered Willis. "But I shall try to find out. Send a message to headquarters that the spy has broken through the lines and that I am after him."

CHAPTER VIII

THE LITTLE MAN IN BLACK

THE flight of Rogers and Putnam down the lake was followed by no untoward incidents. There was no time, so far as they could perceive, that any of the hostile Indians were on their trail.

They traveled parallel to the western shore until near North West Bay, when they struck across to the head of the little inlet. There Rogers uncovered a birch canoe in the brush, kept concealed for such emergencies.

He purposed to travel direct to Fort William Henry with his news. Putnam, who had intended to accompany him, now found his preference was to continue along the woods trail on the chance of finding signs of some of the enemy's scouts.

"It don't take more'n one to get the information into General Winslow," he remarked. "I'll meet you at the fort. Might as well make a clean job of it."

Rogers readily acquiesced, and after he had set out, his graceful craft taking the waters of the lake at a rare pace under his powerful strokes, the Connecticut man swung back to the trail again. For ten miles he advanced slowly and carefully, and by the time he was abreast of Sloop Island he was satisfied that none of the Canadians or Montcalm's Indians was near the southern end of the lake.

Throwing off his concern, he shifted his gait to a brisk trot, when a pistol-shot at one side of the trail brought his attention on edge. Leaving the trail, he crept through the woods until the sound of voices guided him to a tiny opening. He beheld a startling spectacle.

An officer wearing the uniform of the *troupes de terre* was leaning against a tree, the white shoulder of his coat showing a dark stain where he had been wounded. Facing him were two of Rogers' Rangers, one of them holding a long pistol, the other aiming a rifle. As Putnam gained a position behind the officer the latter angrily demanded in excellent English:

"You villains! Why did you shoot me? I had surrendered."

"How'd I know you didn't have a pistol hid in them gay clothes?" defended the man with the pistol. "I'd rather kill the devil then to have him kill me. We ain't particular how we treat spies."

"I am no spy, you idiot. I am Captain Claude Raymond Pean, aid to Chevalier de Levis. I am here in my uniform, detailed to make discoveries."

"Well, I guess you ain't hurt much if you can talk as fast as that. By the way you handle the king's English I'd say you was a renegade, and that's worse than being a spy."

"—— your distinctions, you imbecile! Take me to a surgeon where I can have this clumsy wound dressed. You not only knock a hole in my shoulder but you must spoil my coat, as though white coats grew on bushes out here. Given I had you in Ticonderoga I'd turn you over to our young *petits-maîtres* to be drilled in the use of firearms."

As he finished taunting them he reeled and all but fell. The rangers sprang to assist him, one dropping his rifle, the other thrusting his empty pistol into his belt.

With a low laugh of triumph the Frenchman whipped out two pistols, covered the astounded men and gloated:

"What children! I come and I go. I visit your town of Albany. I procure important papers. I come here alone and I pick up two prisoners. No one stops me. And yet the pig of a Loudoun says he will take Ticonderoga.

"Now ahead of me, little ones. I have a canoe on the lake. You shall paddle me to the Carrying-Place in great state."

The ranger with the pistol caught a glimpse of Putnam's face in the bushes and only his woods training enabled him to conceal his joy. With a wink to his companion he mournfully said:

"Guess you fooled us fine, Mr. Frenchy. I for one don't go for to take any chances. You're too smooth for me. Here we go."

And with his hands clasped behind his neck he started toward Putnam's hiding-place. His friend, realizing some game was on, fell in behind him. The French officer strode after them, his pistols raised and ready, his wounded shoulder in no way seeming to inconvenience him.

He chuckled as he herded them into the bush, taunting them with being the only Englishmen who had dared leave the fort. With never a swerve of the head toward Putnam's ambush the rangers passed into the undergrowth, keeping close together and only a few feet ahead of their captor.

The lake was near and so presumably was the officer's hidden canoe. He stuck one of his pistols into his belt and commenced ridiculing his prisoners, demanding how they had dared to venture into the woods alone. He was in the midst of his ironical remarks when two muscular hands shot from the bushes and seized his hands, and with a vicious twist caused the pistol to drop to the ground. The officer's exclamation of rage was his prisoners' cue to wheel about and shout triumphantly.

"Stand back, you two," ordered Putnam, who had closed in with his man. "You had your chance and he made fools of you."

Then to his struggling opponent:

"You are hurt. If you do not give up I shall have to hurt you some more. Your case is hopeless."

"I make honorable surrender to you," sighed the Frenchman. "—— only knows why I should be punished thus and not allowed to at least surrender to an equal in rank. I am aid to Chevalier——"

"Yes, yes. I know all that," dryly cut in Putnam. "Also that you enter and leave Albany at your pleasure. It may make your mind easy to know I hold commission as captain. You must have cut a brave figure in Albany."

"I did but make game of these simple ones. Of course I have not been in Albany. It was said to throw them off their guard. But we shall all be in Albany soon, please God!"

"Certainly when it does please Him," sternly said Putnam. "You make so free with the Almighty in your talk I wonder if your talk about a certain paper is just another way of talking."

The officer's face grew ghastly.

"I did but jest with the men. Take me to a surgeon."

"Fasten his arms behind him with his belt, Whitten," Putnam directed the tall ranger. "He's a slippery varmint. Good. Now see if he has any little paper upon him. I've a notion he spoke truthfully in his boasting."

THE rangers searched but brought to light only another pistol, small and mounted with silver, quite unlike any weapon any of the three had ever seen.

"Release my arms. I feel very faint. I give my parole not to try to escape," said the officer in a weak voice.

"The paper first," gently replied Putnam. "Whitten couldn't find it, but perhaps he didn't look close enough."

As he spoke he passed his hands over the white coat and was rewarded by a faint rustling sound in the hem of the skirt.

"This is much better, much better," murmured Putnam.

He ripped open the skirt and pulled forth a narrow strip of paper folded to the width of the hem. Opening this he read it through and whistled softly.

"'Mount to much, cap'n?" curiously asked one of the rangers.

"Only a noose unless he can prove it was given to him out here in the woods and while he was wearing his uniform. It's a list of our forces and it tells where they're stationed. Cap'n Pean, you're in a desperate situation."

"Not so. One of our spies got that in Albany and gave it to me."

"Who was the spy?"

"I can't tell that."

"Then you'll swing," was the cold reply.

Putnam again looked at the paper, and now he knew it had been written by a woman. Although not versed in scholarly attainments there was no denying the femininity of the writing. He could think of no one but Elizabeth Lidindick.

"Well, Cap'n Pean, you're caught. It's for General Winslow to say whether you're spy or rate as a ranger. You men take him to the fort. His wound is only a flesh wound. Very poor shooting. Whitten, you're to carry the paper. Report to General Winslow how it all happened and say I shall be in shortly if he cares to question me. By the way, cap'n, you speak good English. Better than I do."

"I am a Frenchman. It is natural I should do things better than you, a beggarly provincial," was the haughty rejoinder.

"I admire to see you going down with your colors flying," said Putnam.

Then he motioned the men to start with the prisoner to the fort.

Putnam felt deeply concerned over the Lidindick girl. Although a lion in battle the sight of suffering in women and children easily reduced him to tears.

To know that Jan the Rogue's daughter was supplying information to the enemy was most distressing. So long as nothing more serious than a deep sympathy for the French cause, and at the worst a mischievous activity in embarrassing the English, could be proved against her she stood in danger of nothing more grave than temporary restraint.

It was bad enough to believe she had obtained the information of General Webb's proposed advance to succor Oswego, but in that case there was the possibility that she had turned the information over to her father, and that he, not she, had passed it on to Vaudreuil. Putnam knew this was splitting hairs, yet his hearty sympathy for youth would force him to build up some sort of a defense whenever possible.

But this detailed report he had just examined, revealing Lord Loudoun's strength and weaknesses, struck at the very heart of the colonies. It evidenced deep premeditation and carefully thought-out plans. The very fact it had been secured proved the spy realized its importance. There was no belittling this action.

"She's getting dangerous as a rattlesnake," he mumbled as he continued along the trail toward the end of the lake. "Pretty as a picture.

"I don't like to be harsh with girls. Wouldn't want any one to be harsh with any of my four at home. But she must be stopped. Yes, she must be stopped or she'll run that white neck of hers into a noose sure's chain lightning."

Without a sound to preface the intrusion an Indian, naked except for his clout, appeared in the trail before Putnam and raised an empty hand. He was oiled and painted for war and freshly shaven. Not a muscle of Putnam's strong face quivered at the unexpected appearance, although his heart had given a jump when the Indian stepped before him.

"You don't need to show empty hands to your white brother, Running Wolf. You were at Albany with Sir William Johnson when the war began."

"My brother goes to the fort?" asked the Indian, speaking slowly and distinctly in English.

"To the fort, red brother."

"They say my brother killed a sorcerer."

"It is so. Joseph Brant, the young Mohawk, heard me say it. The sorcerer was a Potawatomi."

"They say the Potawatomi's *orenda* is so strong it lets him live again."

"He is dead. My knife let out his life. I threw his scalp at the feet of his friends."

"They say he is now a little black man. He walks the woods at night to find my white brother and have his life."

Putnam sought to put these enigmatic words together. That the Iroquois—he was one of Johnson's Mohawks—wished to warn him against some peril was obvious. The ranger knew it would be useless to question him. Whatever the Indian desired to reveal would be given voluntarily. Putnam repeated:

"A little black man. He walks these woods at night. Then he can not be seen."

The Mohawk traced an outline on the forest floor with the toe of his moccasin, and said:

"After the sun goes down and before the night comes, then he is seen. The Mohawks have seen him and he has done them no harm.

"The Great Heads flew over our castles, their hair streaming behind them, before Oswego was taken. They flew toward Albany. Now again they have been seen, flying toward Albany. It is bad."

He was gone as quietly as a shadow is blotted out by a sunbeam. It was useless to seek him and to question him.

His reference to the Great Heads, the evil spirits which rode the heavens, their viperous hair snapping behind them, when disaster was about to fall, was meant as a warning against some danger from the French and their red allies. Very possibly this was the result of Mohawk scouts bringing back word to Sir

William Johnson that the French were rushing reenforcements to Ticonderoga. A comet or a falling star would then be translated as a Great Head.

But the "little black man" was baffling. The boy Brant had told his people of Putnam's attack on the sorcerer's lodge.

Now something had been seen that impressed the Mohawks with the fancy that the Potawatomi had merely changed his shape and now walked the earth, seeking revenge. Something had been seen at dusk by the Mohawk scouts; something so evasive that after repeated efforts to run it down the Indians had explained their failures by pronouncing it supernatural. But as there must be a definite explanation for its presence near the lake the next step was to link it with Putnam's slaying of the sorcerer, the most recent event of interest to the friendly Indians. Now the nature of the phenomenon and the reason for its being were adequately explained.

"THAT'S the Indian of it," he mused. "See something; try to catch it and can't. It becomes a spirit—spirit of man just killed. Back to kill some one. That some one is me.

"They try to catch it just after sundown several times, but it gets away. Then it must have a mighty good hiding-place. Then they must 'a' seen it in the same place every time. Couldn't have hiding-places all over the country promiscuous that a Mohawk couldn't find. Yet I guess after the first time or so they didn't hunt very close. Now where did they see it?"

His lowered gaze noticed the rude outlines traced in the earth by Running Wolf. As he looked down on the marks they became familiar. Stepping to where the Indian had stood, he beheld:

"Stubborn. Wouldn't speak right out in meeting. Probably afraid it would bring him bad luck. So he drew a map with his foot," mused Putnam. "That irregular line on the right is Shone Creek. The dab at the bottom of it is old Fort Anne. Then the straight up-and-down line must be the road from Fort Edward to the lake. And the horseshoe is the head of the lake. And that's where the mysterious little critter of a black man walks at sunset.

"Well, we must see if he's walking tonight. The Mohawk must 'a' been impressed mighty strong to hunt me up and give me the warning."

The distance to the creek was about ten miles, and the sun was four hours high. Examining his gun and tightening his belt, he set off at a round pace. Where the trail swung in toward Fort William Henry he made a détour and struck into the Fort Edward road below the fort. The road ran through a swamp, and once clear of this he struck off southeast in a direct line for the abandoned fort.

The more he turned it over the more puzzling it became. The appearance of the man in black had been persistent and confined to one locality, else the superstitious fears of the Mohawks would not have been aroused.

The disappearance of the mysterious being must have been marked by an abruptness and a completeness that had nonplused the Indians. In fact, inimitable hunters of men as they were, the Mohawks must have been so thoroughly startled that they could account for their failure only by ascribing it to the supernatural.

Putnam approached the clearing around the fort with all his cunning, hoping to glimpse the man in black although the sun still rode the horizon. So softly did he tread that he all but stepped on a fox dozing behind a log. Rabbits hopped across his path without taking fright.

On reaching the end of the woods he halted and from behind the shelter of a tree looked out on the bush-ground clearing. On the banks of the creek and directly opposite his position were the remains of log ramparts and earthwords and fallen timbers—all that were left of the old post.

From his hidden position he studied each clump of bushes, seeking some sign of motion among their branches. Except as a bird lighted on topmost twig or hunted for seeds on the ground, there was no suggestion of life. Insect life droned heavily over the sun-soaked spot, but no birds took the air in fear of what was hidden under alder and cherry branches.

"Deader'n last year's fires," decided Putnam, hesitating whether to cross the clearing by one of the winding paths or to circle it under cover of the forest.

While he was debating the question he pricked his ears to a shrill, sweet bird-call. A few months back he would have accepted it as genuine. But a mating-song at the end of Summer?

"Cleverly done," he softly whispered. "And yet not so clever after all. An Indian would know better. If that's the ghost in black then it never gave that signal within hearing of a Mohawk. Expecting some one. Perhaps seen me and thinks I'm that some one."

He was tempted to essay an answer to the call, but instead began moving around the clearing and keeping well within the forest.

He discoverd nothing to increase his suspicions until he came to a narrow lane that marked an early road from the Hudson to the old fort. This was grown up to briers and bushes and was slashed by the last rays of the sun.

He had halted and was weighing the risk of being seen should he cross it, when he was startled to discern a figure slip behind a tree across the way. It was only a glimpse, scarcely more than a consciousness of motion, as one gets from the corner of the eye. He believed the figure was thin and garbed in

black, but whether his eye told him this, or his imagination, he could not decide.

He watched the spot where the figure disappeared and as minutes passed began to doubt if he had seen anything. It might have been a falling leaf, the swaying of a branch or the flight of a bird, distorted and misinterpreted by his oblique vision.

Then it came again, only this time it was much farther away, near where the old road ended at the clearing. As before it came and went before he could analyze it. Still, it was his belief that it was a black figure.

"Damme!" he muttered, ruefully rubbing his nose. "No wonder the Mohawks believe it's devil's work and talk of the Great Heads and go home to dance the Witches' Dance. Just a flicker, that's all. And each time out of the tail of my eye. Bird hopping? No, no. I saw it. Now I must see it fair and square."

Dropping on his hands and knees, he swiftly made his way through the ancient tree-stumps and through the brambles until he had diagonally crossed the lane. Once in the woods, he rose and hastened to where he had seen the figure vanish.

Now as he pressed forward toward the clearing something impelled him to turn and look back across the road. His eyes bulged in amazement. For an instant he was incapable of action.

Standing by a tree was the figure. It was a man dressed all in black and it did not seem to have any face. He stared at it squarely, but before his brain could function it was gone.

"—— full of fiddlers!" he wrathfully exclaimed; and discarding finesse he bounded across the open space in pursuit.

He found nothing. He looked for tracks, but so far as any signs could prove to the contrary the figure might have been an apparition.

"Ghosts don't give bird-calls out of season," he grimly insisted.

RESUMING his old cunning, he penetrated deeper into the gloomy depths. Here the trees were free from underbrush and grew huge of bole and with much room between their massive trunks. A fan of aisles radiated from any position he might take up. Twilight was well advanced under the thick arch, and yet he could see clearly; more so, he believed, than when the high sun stirred up shimmering heat-waves.

There was a quality in the atmosphere which permitted objects on the edge of his vision to stand out clear cut. And distinctly he beheld it—a slim figure in black, leisurely passing from tree to tree and making toward the Fort William Henry road.

He threw up his rifle and as quickly lowered it. The fellow had not offered him any harm. It had not resented the pursuit of the friendly Mohawks. It would scarcely be sportsmanlike to fire. The figure passed behind a tree, then reappeared, moving even more slowly. With a yell of "Halt!" Putnam raced after it, whereat it vanished.

Its deliberate retreat, its failure to seek concealment until he gave chase, reminded him of the mother bird fluttering from her nest and simulating a broken wing to decoy some intruder away from her young. Instead of keeping up the pursuit Putnam stole back to the clearing and entered one of the game-paths. The unknown was eager to toll him far into the woods.

But what was there to draw him away from? The woods were open to any scout or prowler. If there was a secret place, a hidden camp where one could rest and cook food, the rather open withdrawal of the strange figure might be understood.

The ranger closed his eyes and reviewed the surrounding country, passing over each possible covert. He could recall no hollow nor cave that was licensed to remain unobserved. On opening his eyes he found himself staring at the ruins of the fort, and his heart gave a little jump of exultation. Many times he had passed the mound of earth and the débris of decaying timbers, but he could not recall any investigation of the ruins.

"Now that would make some sense to all this foolishness," he told himself as he began crawling closer to the creek.

The sun lost its balance on the rugged horizon and slipped below the grim mountain wall. In swarmed the dusk.

Putnam remained motionless, his eyes fixed on the ruins. He counted until he had measured off a score of minutes, then stopped.

Before him stood the man in black. He was several rods away and his thin figure blended with the dark background and the straight lines of fallen and fire-charred beams. If the ranger had not been watching for such an appearance he would have mistaken it for an upright timber. As he watched the figure moved over some earthworks and was gone.

"If it ain't a ghost it'll get hungry and have to eat," mused Putnam, shifting his gun to his left hand and drawing his ax.

The twilight now crept above the crown of the forest and became leavened with dusk. It was impossible to make out objects across the clearing. The ranger sniffed several times and nodded his head triumphantly. The reek of burning wood was perceptible. The unknown was cooking rations.

Creeping to the edge of the ruins, Putnam began reconnoitering the earthen rampart. Selecting a section that seemed free of débris, he crawled to the top and ducked his head and stifled a cough. Directly under his nose was issuing a thin stream of smoke.

The situation was clear to him now. Some one had a hiding-place beneath the rampart. Some one was risking a small fire, knowing the smoke could not be seen in the darkness.

Gingerly feeling his way, Putnam descended the other side of the rampart and began feeling about. It was several minutes before he discovered a hole. In the daylight it would have appeared to be an opening formed by timbers falling and piling up in a criss-cross jumble with the earth caving in over the mass. But as he passed his hand over the lip of the hole he noted it was worn smooth.

He remembered the time he had crawled underground to get the wolf that had been killing his sheep. Something more than sheep was at stake this time. Finding a rest for his hands, he lowed himself downward until his moccasins rested on hard-packed earth. He was standing upright with his head barely flush with the top of the hole and apparently surrounded by a solid wall of dirt and buried logs. He knew this could not be, and the first pass of his hand located a blanket stretched over an opening.

With the point of his knife he cut a tiny three-cornered opening, and a ray of light rewarded him. Applying an eye, he beheld an underground retreat about a dozen feet square. A handful of dry sticks was burning in a tiny rock fireplace and giving off a minimum of smoke. The smoke found a way out through a crack in the roof.

By the fireplace and with back to the blanket crouched a figure in black. Stuck in a bottle at one side burned a candle. Near it and suspended from a peg hung a black mask. Putnam now understood why the figure he had stalked seemed to be minus a face, or, as the Mohawk had said, was "without a head."

Along the earthen wall were various garments hanging from pegs. Prominent in the strange wardrobe was a vividly scarlet coat and breeches and a silver-lace hat. He pronounced it to be the uniform of an English officer. But beside it hung the white and violet of the French regulars; next came the rough garb worn by Rogers Rangers, then the more picturesque fringed hunting-shirt and trousers of a Southern forest-runner. The last was almost identical with the woods clothes worn by Ephraim Willis.

Some fir boughs at one side evidenced frequent occupany of the place. With a sweep of his hand Putnam tore the blanket aside and with his ax half-raised stepped inside.

WITH a shrill scream the figure at the fire twisted about and reached to upset the candle. With a leap Putnam seized the outstretched arm, then released his hold, snatched up the light and stared in amazement at the fear-stricken face.

"The Lidindick girl!" he exclaimed in huge disgust.

"And you? Who are you?" she hoarsely demanded, drawing back from him.

He held the candle close to his own face and dryly replied—

"I'm the man who caught you going in swimming near the Dieskau Path, and who was silly enough to believe you when you said you'd come to him."

"Captain Putnam," she whispered, her face softening in relief. "Thank —— it's you and not some other."

He frowned in disapproval of her masculine attire. It was like Willis' ranger's dress except it was made of black cloth and had no fringe. Round the slim waist was a belt with a loop for an ax. The ax, a knife and a gun stood against the wall near the couch of boughs.

"You oughter be ashamed of yourself," he gruffly told her, fighting to keep pity out of his voice as he stared into the small face and the big blue eyes. "We caught your partner, Cap'n Pean."

"Caught him?" she whispered tremulously. "And he's——"

"Not yet. Probably will be although he says he isn't a spy. But we found a paper on him that oughter send him to the noose."

"Oh, not that!" she passionately cried. "He was just acting as messenger."

"He boasted of being in Albany."

"It was I who got the paper. I swear it."

"Whose scarlet uniform is that?"

"Mine."

"Nonsense. Ten times too big for you. If you can't do it well don't try to lie at all, little woman."

"They are my father's," she sadly confessed.

He glanced over the array and nodded his head slowly. Then he advanced the light to the scarlet uniform and picked a blackberry leaf from under a button and gave it a glance.

"Your father did not wear this coat in here," he accused. "It's not many hours since this leaf grew on the bush. I'm afraid your friend Cap'n Pean spoke the truth when he said he had been in Albany."

She refused to speak but stood before him, her small hands clenched.

"It makes it bad for you—that paper I took from him. Bad, whether you or he got it."

He watched her warily but she lowered her eyes that he might not read her thoughts, and he continued:

"The paper I took from Pean was in a woman's hand of write. You copied the 'riginal and gave him the copy. I want the 'riginal—now."

"I don't suppose you'll search me," she said, her voice suddenly becoming mocking and her eyes dancing recklessly. "You with four girls of your own."

"I'll have that paper," vowed Putnam, his anger rising. "You young she-devil, do you know what your meddling will do if it ain't stopped? It'll bring a second Braddock's defeat with the Indians killing and burning right up to the hill fort in Albany. Now hand over that paper."

She darted toward the opening, but he caught her with his free hand and drew her back.

"Release me! You have daughters, you said." And this time there was no defiance in her voice.

"Aye; and there are other fathers along the upper Hudson who have little girls. And by the grace of God they're going to keep them from the ax and stake of Montcalm's hair-dressers."

"The English use Indians," she cried. "That they don't use more is simply because they can't get them. Do you think I love thoughts of bloodshed? Do I risk my neck as a spy because I enjoy it? It is my duty. It is for my mother's country. I'm French. You can't have the paper. I dare you to touch me."

"You—you young hussy!" groaned Putnam, bewildered by her rapid change of front. "What you need is a good birching. You little fool! Do you think Loudoun'll spare that slim neck of yours if he knows the desperate chance you're trying to force on him?

"No, I can't search you. But I can take you to Fort William Henry and the sutler's wife shall search you."

Her eyes blazed in triumph. She dropped her lids, but not quickly enough to prevent his reading her great joy.

"Oh, you won't have any chance to talk with Cap'n Pean," he warned. "He was the man you was whistling to, I take it. Only birds don't sound their mating-call after their families have grown up and are getting their own living."

He paused and studied her keenly. Now the small face was under control but he knew she was secretly gloating over something. No; it did not disappoint her to hear she could not see the Frenchman. Yet she was pleased to be taken a prisoner to the fort, he believed.

"Are you ready?" he harshly asked.

She betrayed herself by eagerly taking a step toward the exit. He pulled her back, and, placing a hand under her chin, gently lifted her head until he could stare steadily into the small oval face.

"Tickled into fits to go to the fort and be searched by the sutler's wife," he muttered. "Mighty well pleased to leave this hole. Why? Because you're keen to get me away from here. Because the paper isn't on you. It's here somewhere. Ah! A bull's-eye! Dead center!" he cried as her eyes dilated in great fear.

"Warm! Now let's see."

He swept his gaze back along the row of garments and discovered a dress of homespun, the only feminine gear there.

"Your gown. Uniform worn by Pean. Rest belong to Jan the—Jan Lidindick."

"What of it? You can't hurt him now. I'm proud of what he did to help my mother's country," she sullenly said.

"Now we've found the hiding-place the clothes ain't much importance," Putnam admitted. "Now to find the paper. It's here. You're keen to risk the trip to the fort to get me out of this place. You're hoping to escape and get back here or to get word to some frog-eater to come here and get the paper."

She laughed derisively.

"Very good. Find it if it's here."

Now she was composed and confident.

Putnam frowned and rubbed his nose. He had lost ground. He had had her near the breaking-point. Now she had a fresh grip on herself and it would be difficult to obtain any help from her.

"You had better——"

She halted and bit her lip. A drop of the melted tallow fell on his hand and completed the warning she had thoughtlessly commenced.

"—hurry, as the candle won't last but a couple of minutes longer, eh?" he mused. "Started to tell me before you thought. Shows that either you're honest at heart, Elizabeth Lidindick, or else fear we'll have trouble in quitting this place in the dark. Last don't make any sense. Guess there's an honest spot in your heart. Poor Ephraim Willis has grieved a heap on your account."

"Poor Ephraim Willis?" she faltered, her eyes widening with terror. "He is well? Quite well?"

"I suppose so. Had a knife-wound in his leg last time I saw him. We was near this clearing. Huh! We shot a Indian carrying a message from you. Now I know why he was so far south of the lake. He come here to get it. We caught him going away."

She shuddered and twisted her fingers together convulsively.

"Poor lad! Poor Ephraim Willis!" she whispered, burying her face in her hands.

"More play-acting to kill time till the candle goes out——"

"How dare you?" she hissed, lifting her head and revealing eyes that blazed through tears.

"Good Lord, child! What next?" roared the exasperated ranger. "Enough of this foolishness. We're going to get out of this hole. And we're going to take the paper with us. Then I'll see if you can't be shut up somewhere so you can't give any more help to Montcalm or get yourself hung."

"How will you find it?" she taunted.

"You'll tell me where it is."

"Not to save my life. Kill me if you will."

"You little fool. You'll tell me without

opening your lips. You'll tell me and I won't do nothing but hold your hand gently, like this."

And as he spoke he took her limp hand and slid his grasp up along the wrist.

Much puzzled and a bit fearful, she stared at him, then threw back her head and laughed scornfully.

"Are you crazy? Or do you think you can read my thoughts? Or perhaps you're one of those Salem witches?"

"Some of my folks helped stop that cruel business," he simply replied. "Maybe I'm crazy, but I don't think so. Now we'll begin. I'll ask questions, but it ain't necessary for you to bother with answering them. Just to hear myself talk, I guess."

"I'm glad you don't expect me to talk," she politely remarked.

HE SET the candle to one side and drew the girl back so she could not extinguish it, and then began—

"You hid the paper in the clothes, in some of the clothes." He paused and as he had expected her pulse continued beating smoothly. He laughed quietly and shifted his attack by saying:

"You dug a hole in the wall and put the paper in it. Wrong? I'm not surprized."

"What are you trying to do with me?" she asked, her voice strained and worried.

"I'm just waiting for you to tell me where the paper is."

"You'll never know that from my lips."

"I don't expect to. But we'll have patience," he soothed.

Then suddenly:

"It's under the fir boughs. No? Wrong again of course. Now let's see. A small kettle on the fire. Not in that. Of course, it couldn't be. You didn't expect me to come here and you haven't hid it since you came here.

"So you must have had it hidden when you come in. But not on your person, else you wouldn't be so keen to be searched at the fort. Yet you brought it with you, hid in its usual place. Ah! That does tell on you! Getting warmer now."

And without glancing at her he felt her pulse race madly for a part of a minute. Gradually it quieted down but did not quite return to normal.

"Brought it with you in the place you've been carrying it," he repeated slowly. "I've thought of everything in this hole and it ain't in anything you found here when you come in. Brought it with you, but not on your person. Brought it tucked in something you fetched in here. It can't be in your ax or your knife."

He waited and felt the telltale life-current surge and beat most madly.

"But there is your gun!" he sharply completed.

With a shrill cry she endeavored to wrench her wrist loose. He held her fast, saying:

"I don't want to hurt you, so don't hurt yourself. But I must have that paper, child. You've done your best, but your blood can't lie no matter how much you train your tongue."

"Let me go! Let me go!" she shrieked, kicking madly toward the fragment of candle.

He held her at arm's length and stooped and snatched up the gun and fired it against the wall.

She screamed in pain as he released his hold, not in physical pain, but in anguish that he should have discovered the prize. As he grabbed up the fragments of smoldering paper she ducked under his arm and kicked the dying candle from the bottle.

The scream and the explosion of the gun had been heard by some one outside, for now both the girl and the ranger heard the sound of heavy pounding on the roof of the underground chamber, and loose dirt began falling into the fire. With a bound the girl was under the blanket and swarming from the hole, shrilly calling:

"Help! Help! Who will help a woman!"

Stuffing the bits of paper inside his hunting-shirt, Putnam followed after her and gained the well just as strong hands lifted her over the edge.

"If you love me stop him!" he heard her plead.

With a bound Putnam leaped up and caught his hands on a beam and drew himself half out of the hole when a heavy body fell upon him and violent hands fumbled at his throat. Over and over they rolled, Putnam fighting for his life and taken at a disadvantage because his assailant had half a grip on his throat and seemed possessed of the devils' own nimbleness.

At last Putnam got his knees under him, violently bucked up his back, all but dislodging his antagonist, and succeeded in breaking the clutch at his throat. With a deep, bull-like roar he began a smashing offensive that carried his man backward. They were in the bottom of a trench and could see nothing. Each furious lunge invited impalement on some sharp stake.

"Now, you frog-eater!" roared Putnam, securing both hands in a branny throat.

"—— my blood!" choked the other.

"What?" yelled Putnam. "Ephraim Willis! You big fool!"

"Israel Putnam!" choked Willis, crawling blindly to his feet and caressing his throat. "In ——'s name, what were you doing to that poor girl?"

"Saving the little fool from the noose," snapped Putnam. "What the —— do you mean by pitching into your officer, sir?"

"I didn't know it was you," moaned Willis.

"There was the gunshot, then the scream. I knew it was a woman. I believed she was in terrible danger. Then she crawled out of the earth at my feet. I spoke and she knew me. She asked me to save her. I thought—Heaven knows what I thought."

"Well, I suppose you're satisfied by this time I wasn't trying to shoot her," growled Putnam. "And she's satisfied, seeing as how she got us two to fighting so she could have a chance to get away."

"I'm after her——"

"You're not. Not now. No more chance then you have of being named governor of New France. I took a paper away from her. One that would have put us all in pickle if it fell into Montcalm's hands. It is a list of our troops, giving our full strength and showing where the men are distributed. There were two of them——"

"Three, unless you're counting the one I got back in Albany. I had my head nearly knocked off. There's a spy, dresses in a scarlet uniform of the Jersey Blues. Is he down in that hole? —— his liver, I'll kill him."

"Softly. None of that, lad, or I'll put you under guard for the rest of the war. Cap'n Pean may hang for a spy, but he mustn't have any Indian tricks played on him."

"Pean? Oh, Lord! What luck! Such —— luck!" groaned Willis. "I've just come from Fort William Henry. They told me to tell you, if we met, that your prisoner escaped from the guard-house. And I never suspected he was 'Sergeant Enoch Champers of the Jersey Blues,' and the man who I would have bagged in Albany if not for that little spit-fire."

"Did he get the paper back?"

"I guess not. They didn't mention it. He got away right after they put him under guard. Slippery devil. Now he's loose. The girl may meet him. I must find her."

"Let her go. Why follow her? I have her paper."

"I must find her because she nearly stove my head in—and—and was sorry for doing it. Said she was sorry——"

"Sorry she didn't do a good job, I guess," fumed Putnam, feeling about and finding his rifle. "Mighty little she cared for our feelings when she got us to fighting each other like she did. Well, this hiding-place won't serve her any more, and I don't believe she'll steal any more papers in Albany."

"She didn't steal this paper. Pean, dressed as a sergeant in Shirley's old regiment, walked up to the window and reached in and took it off a desk. Hark! A signal!"

It was the bird-call Putnam had heard a few hours before. It ended and then a sweet young voice mellowly called across the clearing:

"Ephraim Willis! Ephraim Willis! I love you, Ephraim Willis!"

CHAPTER IX

INTO THE DANGER ZONE AGAIN

"DID you hear that?" Willis whispered, seizing Putnam's arm.

"You're trembling like a poplar leaf. Get back your control, or you'll find yourself in a dish."

"Did you hear her—calling out something?" fiercely persisted Willis, giving Putnam's arm a vigorous shake.

"You forget you're yanking the arm of your officer, sir. Yes, Ephraim, I heard the minx. Another trick to get you into the woods where some of her friends will catch you."

"No! Never!" cried Willis. "She has said it. By Heavens, the impossible has happened. I'm off."

"You'll come to the fort with me," Putnam ordered.

"I'm going to find the woman who's to be my wife," retorted Willis.

"You'll come pretty near obeying orders so long as you stay in this piece of the woods. Now you hark to me."

Putnam ceased speaking and swept his gun-barrel about in a circle.

"——'s burning! The young pup has quit me. How's that for discipline?"

With scarcely a sound to betray his abrupt withdrawal Willis had heeded the lure of the voice and was now threading his way through the forest in search of the one woman. With a grunt of disgust Putnam struck out for Fort William Henry.

He should have been immensely pleased with the success of his adventure. He had recovered two most important papers. Willis already had recovered the third. Only by a miracle could the girl or her confederates again secure such valuable information. Yet his triumph was soured by Willis' behavior.

"Good boy. Home folks," he muttered as he used his gun as a staff in picking his way back to the fort. "But the minute a woman, *the* woman, comes along he throws aside everything to chase her. The tarnation fool!"

This characterization soothed his irritated nerves, and he repeated it; but inasmuch as its application was based on *the* woman his mood gradually became speculative and he lifted his heavy brows and pondered. After all there was no knowing what a man might do when the only woman entered his life and called to him. Putnam's own courtship and marriage had been after the orderly New England fashion; but had the trail to his woman taken him amid dangers and against great odds would he have held back? He smiled grimly and admitted:

"I'd been a 'tarnal fool, too. Well, well, I only hope the spit-fire isn't playing any game on him."

Arriving at the edge of the abatis, Putnam called his name to a nervous sentry and was passed through a narrow, winding path which led down to the lake shore where burned the camp-fires of the rangers. He found Major Rogers overhauling a gun while five of the men lounged around the blaze smoking and awaiting their orders. As Putnam strode into the circle Rogers sprang to his feet, exclaiming:

"Just the man I want, captain! I've sent several scouts to find you. Rather, I hoped you'd run across one of them. You have nothing of importance to report since sending in your prisoner, I suppose, and I have very important work for you to do. That paper you sent in by Whitten rather sets General Winslow's teeth on edge. You're to go after the escaped prisoner."

"He must have a good start," said Putnam dubiously.

"Oh, there's several small bands out after him, trying to pick up his trail. You're to strike direct for Ticonderoga and pick him up right under the walls of the fort if he manages to get through. General Winslow now fears he may have the original paper hidden on him. He escaped almost as soon as he was locked up and before the general realized the importance of the capture and could have him thoroughly searched. The general was just examining the paper when John Dilly brought word the man was gone. ——'s own luck!"

"General Winslow can rest easy about the paper. There was the 'riginal and two copies. Ephraim Willis got one back in Albany. I got one from the prisoner. And here is this."

He pulled out the fragments of the paper that had been concealed in the girl's gun. Smoothing out the pieces, the two examined them briefly. Rogers said:

"This is the original. No question about it. I'll take it to General Winslow myself. How and where did you get it?"

"In a dugout under the ruins of old Fort Anne. Found it tucked in a gun-barrel."

"Who'd the gun belong to?"

Putnam cast a glance at the deeply interested loungers and replied—

"To the Albany spy."

Rogers' fierce countenance grew troubled.

"I understand," he slowly observed. "You have great prudence, Captain Putnam."

The rangers accepted this as a tribute to Putnam's excellent common sense. Putnam knew it referred to his forbearance in naming the spy.

"Willis is trailing that spy now," he informed.

Rogers' eyes lighted and he responded:

"Good! Now as to Captain Pean. We must get him dead or alive. He probably memorized some of the figures.

"You will start at once and make the foot of the lake as fast as possible. I've a band over at South Bay to pick up the fellow if he tries to get back by that route. Remember you are to kill him if you can't capture him."

"Very good, sir. I'm off at once. Do I pick my men?"

"If you wish. These men here are well known to you. I had planned to take them with me if you hadn't come in."

"If they suit you they'll suit me. I see John Dilly is among them. Good! Swing your packs down to the whale-boat, men. You're to head for North West Bay and stay there till I join you. I shall go ahead in a canoe. John Dilly, you speak French?"

"Good as English, sir. I lived ten years at Montreal when a younker. No New Hampshire man knows their lingo better."

And he spat to clean his mouth after the confession.

"Then you shall go with me in the canoe."

Exchanging a few words with Rogers, Putnam selected a birch and directed Dilly to put their blankets and rations into it. With a final reminder to the men to make all speed with the whale-boat he took his position in the bow of the canoe, and under the impetus of the two paddles the light craft darted over the placid waters and rapidly left the boat and the light of the camp-fire far behind.

It was a clear, starlit night and Putnam chose to hold to the middle of the lake until near Sloop Island, six miles from Fort William Henry. On sighting the black mass against the sky-line he swerved inshore and informed Dilly:

"We have plenty of time. So we'll scout the hind side of this and Long Island."

"I come down from here this morning and seen nothing."

"We'll take a look to fill in the time."

"So derned dark we'll get snagged," grunted Dilly. "Better land at the head of Sloop and scout across. The back side is filled with drift. Hard to get through in the day-time."

Putnam was silent for a moment, then agreed:

"All right. We'll do that. And here we are, and it's black as inside your hat."

THE canoe drifted up to the tip of the island very slowly, the two men concentrating their senses on the wooded shore, now discernible as a black wall. Except for the occasional *plop* of a fish, or the cry of a loon, there were no sounds to disturb the drowsy quiet of the night.

The birch took the sand gently and the scouts stepped into the water. Putnam lifted the craft half its length up on the tiny beach.

"I'll go one way. You go t'other. We'll meet on the back side," he whispered.

"I'm off round this end," said Dilly, turning to the south.

Putnam entered the bushes and soon found an old trail. He followed this some rods, then halted and listened suspiciously. He could hear nothing but the usual night sounds. Still he seemed loath to advance, and instead he rapidly retraced his steps until opposite the canoe.

Here he indulged in another spell of listening. The starlight permitted him vaguely to make out objects in the open, such as the graceful lines of the birch. Coming to a decision, he swiftly glided to the canoe and, lifting it from the sand, carried it a score of feet to a clump of bushes. Having concealed it to his satisfaction, he turned back to the woods but followed after Dilly rather than rounding the northern end of the island.

Old Indian trails skirted the shores of all waters, and the islands of Lake George were worn deep with ancient paths. Striking into one of these, Putnam passed silently and swiftly around the southernmost point and came to the back of the island in less than half the time it would have taken had he followed the trail north. Between the island the mainland were several islets, famous hiding-places for partizans of either side.

The path now broke from the woods to the shore. As he reached the last line of bushes he halted and sank on his heels. There was a red glow emanating from the nearest islet. It was less than a quarter of a mile from Sloop, and he could plainly make out the figures of men when they passed between him and the blaze. Dilly was somewhere ahead of him; and, returning to the cover of the woods, he pressed forward until fairly abreast of the islet.

A gentle scraping sound drew his attention to the immediate foreground. Some one was either dragging a canoe up the beach or was pushing one into the water. Then the faint dip of a paddle told him the canoe was afloat.

The glare of the fire bothered him but by lying flat and shading his eyes he could see the birch. Gliding down to the water's edge, he ran his fingers over the wet sand and found the tracks left by the man in the canoe.

From the fire a lane of gold extended across the water. Lying prone, he waited until the canoe entered this lane and then drew a bead upon it.

"John Dilly," he softly called out.

There was a pause of a few seconds; then came back—

"Who is it?"

"Putnam."

Hardly had the name been spoken before a gun cracked in the canoe and a ball whistled over Putnam's head. A second later he fired at the middle of the black shape. The man yelled out and then burst into profanity.

This lasted for only a few moments, however. Then the voice was pitched high and shrill and commenced shouting:

"Loudoun takes his men to Louisbourg! Loudoun takes his men to Louisbourg!"

This twice in English; then the stricken man began shouting it in French and concluded by appealing for help.

With the first shot there had come a great outcry from the fire. Now the confusion was giving away to order before harshly shouted commands.

In the sounds of activity Putnam recognized the rattling of oars. Dropping his rifle, he waded into the lake and swam for the drifting canoe. He came up to it and thrust his hand armed with a knife over the side. He met with no resistance.

Reaching in, Putnam felt of the body. It was clothed as a ranger and there was no sign of life. Working to the other end, he drew himself aboard and found the paddle.

With a few strokes he was back at the beach and had secured his gun. Reembarking, he paddled swiftly round the southern point and to his hidden canoe.

"Loudoun takes his men to Louisbourg!" rang through his ears as he hastily searched the dead man. Inside the hunting-shirt he found a folded piece of birch-bark and within this was a piece of paper.

The Frenchmen would come in bateaux and make slow progress, feeling their way round the island. He believed he would have ample warning of their approach. He must identify the dead man beyond any doubt, and he must know the contents of the paper.

In his canoe was torch material and a tinder-box. Regardless of the risk he found the tinder and with his steel and flint managed to light one of the torches.

The dead man was, as he had supposed, John Dilly, ten years a citizen of Montreal.

"When he picked the shortest way and wanted me, his cap'n, to take the long leg of it I guessed something was wrong," mutttered Putnam. "And he was the one who discovered Cap'n Pean had escaped."

He smoothed out the paper. It contained a dozen odd words in French and was signed "Pean, a prisoner." Putnam readily deciphered it to read:

"Loudoun takes the army to Louisbourg. Be ready to strike."

He thrust the torch into the water and placed the paper in the bosom of his shirt. Pean knew of Lord Loudoun's plan to use the bulk of his troops in a campaign against Louisbourg and Cape Breton Island. Dilly was Pean's confederate and had hastened to release him. To double his chances of getting his message through to Montcalm, Pean had written down his information and had delivered it to Dilly to deliver.

On being discovered in the canoe Dilly had chosen to risk discovery in exchange for a

chance to kill Putnam. To slay so famous a scout as Putnam would count as a big coup.

"The —— traitor!" gritted Putnam as he dumped the body on the shore and hitched the canoe to his own. "He figured I was on to his game when I showed up at his heels instead of going round t'other way. He didn't dare risk coming back to explain why he was in the canoe making for the light. And he believed he could drop me.

"Well, well. Even if we get Pean it won't stop Montcalm from learning Lord Loudoun's plans. Pean has told every Frenchman and Caughnawaga red that he's met. Still, the news won't do them any good once we send word back to Winslow that Montcalm knows all about our game."

There was a chance of course that Pean might be among those camping on the islet, and if so it might be possible to make a masterstroke. Opposed to this thought was the knowledge that Dilly had no idea Pean was there, else there would have been no need to shout out the message he could not deliver in person. And who was more likely to know of Pean's plans than Dilly?

Putnam weighed the pros and cons as he paddled toward the middle of the lake, towing the captured canoe. Second thought convinced him that his little force of four men could scarcely cope with the enemy. There was at least one bateau.

And he had no doubts as to the red allies. They were sure to be with the French, scouting ahead and on all sides in their canoes.

He had covered half the distance between Sloop Island and the western shore when he heard oars ahead of him. He whistled softly and was answered by several guns clicking.

"Who comes?" demanded a low voice.

"The king and the provinces."

With that he dashed alongside the boat.

"We thought we heard a gun, cap'n. And where is Dilly?"

"You heard a gun. Should have heard two. You were using your oars carelessly. There is one or more bateaux south of Sloop, and the Lord only knows how many Indians. Muffle your oars!

"John Dilly is dead on Sloop Island. Shot by me after he tried to kill me. He was a spy for the French. He helped Pean escape.

"Here is a paper. Randall will take this extra canoe and will hustle it down to Major Rogers. If Rogers ain't there give it to General Winslow.

"Say I took it from Dilly's body as he was trying to deliver it to the enemy. I suggest he sends a strong force in bateaux and canoes, armed with several wall-pieces, to capture those fellows back of Sloop.

"The rest of you work your boat along near shore and make North West Bay if you can. If you're chased hide the boat and take to the woods. Unless pressed too hard stay hidden near shore so you can take the boat to the bay.

"I'm off to finish my errand. If I don't find you at the bay I'll know you had to return to the fort. But if you have to do that, take more boats and come right back to meet me. I may have a prisoner."

"You'll find us there, or else some of Montcalm's barbers will be dancing our hair," was the grim assurance.

"Don't run foolish risks just to prove you're brave. Every one knows Rogers' men don't mind a fuss."

WITH that they parted and Putnam turned his canoe back toward the north end of Sloop Island. While his major purpose was to find Pean and capture or kill him, and although he no longer believed that Pean could be tarrying back of the island, he could not resist the temptation to spy a bit further upon this band of the enemy. So long as he did not run into an ambush he did not consider himself to be in much danger.

There was no light except what filtered down from the stars, but this was sufficient for him to detect any craft in motion by the time gun-fire would be dangerous. As to pursuit he would rather enjoy that. It would be confined to the Indians in their canoes, and he fancied he could discourage them unless they came in considerable numbers. Yet he was a cautious man and frequently ceased paddling to check up his surroundings.

As his canoe danced in toward the north end of the island he could discover nothing that suggested an enemy's presence. When some thirty rods from the shore he stayed his advance.

The water lapped gently against the canoe. Half-way between him and shore an uprooted berry-bush lay half-submerged.

Putnam's interest was in the woods fringing the shore. What was behind it? Were fierce eyes watching him and hoping he would draw within striking distance? He practised his keenest attention but failed to discern any sign or sound that hinted at an enemy presence. Either they were at the lower end of the island, or else they had returned to their camp.

The latter possibility was hard to entertain. Dilly's wild outcry and the prompt response of the French did not square with the suggestion that the partizans would remain inactive so long as the mystery of Dilly's death was unexplained. Still, if they were at the southern end of the island they were deathly quiet.

"Just common sense tells me they ain't down there where they found the body. They're up here. They see me coming. They're watching me now," he told himself.

As he decided this point he gave a sudden dip and propelled his birch backward to be safe

from a possible volley. After increasing the distance to his satisfaction he resumed studying the dark forest wall, and incidentally noted that the bush in the water was as close as, if not closer than, when he first spied it. The drift of the bush had been pronounced and could not have resulted from any slight current making round the point, as its advance would be at right angles with such a current.

There was scarcely any movement of the air. He wet his finger and held it up and the back of it felt cold. The almost imperceptible breeze was from the west. The bush was drifting against it.

He stooped low and studied the vague shape curiously. He could see that it was a bush, and that was all. A slight splash near it might have been a fish breaking water. And it might be something entirely different.

He gently advanced his gun and brought it to bear on the floating mass. Now its drift suddenly ceased. It was scarcely twenty feet from the canoe and seemed to be stationary. In less suspicious times he would have believed the submerged branches had caught on a sandbar.

All speculation was abruptly terminated as the bush became alive with motion, as if a gigantic fish had become entangled in its web of branches. There was a loud splash; then the foliage seemed to elongate, and with a sullen *swish* a long war-arrow plumped into the gunwale within a few inches of the ranger's head. He discharged his gun, and from the heart of the bush rang out a prolonged howl, the death-cry of a warrior mortally wounded.

Putnam snatched up the paddle to increase the distance between him and the woods, and he wondered why the shore was not streaked with gun-fire. The canoe moved sluggishly; and instantly he remembered the loud splash preceding the discharge of the arrow. Drawing his ax, he crouched low.

The stern of the craft began settling. Next there appeared the dripping scalp-knot of a warrior, and an outstretched hand was lunging a knife at him.

He felt the point rip the front of his shirt, and then he struck with his ax. With his head smashed in like a pumpkin the warrior slipped back into the water without a sound.

Taking the paddle and working desperately, Putnam sent the canoe deeper into the night. A sharp command in French, and a volley of balls hurtled around him.

He continued his flight for half a mile before taking time to reload. He could not see that he was pursued. He upbraided himself for not suspecting that there was more than one savage hidden behind the bush. One had dived to gain the canoe while the other was treading water and using his bow. Those ashore withheld their fire until convinced that the second warrior had failed.

"If he'd had brains enough to rip open the canoe they might 'a' had me," mused Putnam. "Their gun-fire showed there was at least a dozen of them, and probably as many more Indians.

"They won't try to chase me in the boat, but the red devils may come in their canoes. Probably left them at the south end of the island."

Assuming that the Indians would expect him to continue across the lake to the western shore, he shifted his course back to the northeast and ran for Long Island, a mile north of Sloop. He made the island without detecting any signs of the enemy.

His first thought was to remain there and spy on the band. But men were stationed at South Bay to intercept any of Montcalm's spies, and General Winslow would soon be sending men to deal with these intruders.

This realization left but one course for Putnam to pursue. He must make for the Carrying-Place at the foot of the lake and cross to the vicinity of Ticonderoga. Then he must lie in wait for Pean and incidentally collect information about the fort and the outposts.

Thus there would be three barriers erected against Pean's entering Ticonderoga: one at South Bay, where the rangers were holding the sack for all stragglers; one composed of the various small bands of rangers beating the forest and compelling the spy to move on; and this one under the walls of Ticonderoga itself.

He coasted along the western shore of Long Island, and, being satisfied that the savages were not seeking him, struck across the lake to Round Island. On nearing this he heard the click of a hammer being drawn back and hurriedly called out the word for the night, "The king and the provinces."

As he had suspected he had again come upon his rangers in the whale-boat. On inquiring why they had taken refuge there instead of proceeding to the mouth of North West Bay, two miles above, he was informed that two bateaux heavily loaded with men had given them a hard chase and had driven them well across the lake. They had feared the Indians in their canoes more than they did the big boats, but had encountered none of the red men.

"They was hunting for me," said Putnam. "There's two less since I saw you last. The lake seems to be clear. You can make Squaw Island in a few minutes. You must get as close to the bay as possible before light. I'll scout ahead in the canoe."

The men pulled smartly for Squaw Island and on running into a cove were rejoined by Putnam, who cautioned them about building a fire and explained:

"Some one has started a blaze across at the Narrows. I'm going over to look at it. Be

ready to cover my retreat if I come flying. I'll give the word so you'll know it's me."

The men took their guns and settled down to wait and watch. Their attention was divided between the faint light from the fire across the Narrows and the danger of the enemy creeping upon them from the south.

Gradually the east began to lighten, and they were beginning to give up hope of Putnam's return before another night when they beheld his canoe streaking toward them, the paddle flying as if pursued by death. Instantly they were at attention, their guns ready; only they failed to discover anything from which Putnam should flee.

With a swirl of the paddle Putnam brought the birch dancing sidewise into the shore and was softly calling out:

"Take the boat and follow. A capture! Muffle the oars well and pull like the ——!"

They piled into the boat and did as bidden. Putnam kept a pistol-shot ahead of them until they were close to a rocky wall, when he picked up speed and darted off to reconnoiter.

For a few minutes he was lost behind a shoulder of granite; then he reappeared and beckoned energetically for them to come on. They bore down on him and he placed a finger to his lips. As they glided along he whispered:

"A camp of five. They'll be waking now. Each select a man and be ready to fire if they do not surrender."

With that he glided behind the jutting wall, and as the boat followed the rangers found themselves in a tiny cove. Leaving the boat, the men stole after Putnam up a slope, where he brought them to a halt and motioned for them to peer through the bushes.

They beheld five blanketed forms stretched in a row. Beside one of the sleepers was the black three-cornered hat of an officer. A shoulder and arm of the sleeper revealed the white coat and black facings of the *troupes de la marine*, or the French colonial regulars.

"We must capture the officer alive for Winslow," whispered Putnam.

Then he lifted a hand for attention, and one of the men dropped a ramrod. It had no more than clattered against a rock before one of the sleepers sprang to his feet and called—

"*Qui vive?*"

"Surrender!" roared Putnam.

THE five sprang to their feet and jumped for the guns, the officer pulling a brace of pistols and shooting as Putnam led his men from cover. Putnam yelled for his men to fire, and before the four guns three men went down dead and another with a ball through his thigh.

The officer was unharmed and sought to escape. Putnam gave chase. The officer turned and threw his empty pistols, one of them tearing a hole through the ranger's scalp, and then resumed his flight. He ran most nimbly.

Putnam pulled his ax, then thrust it back in his belt and plucked the ramrod from his gun. With a spurt of speed he drew close and hurled the ramrod at the man's legs. It landed between the flying feet, and the man tripped over it and fell headlong. Before he could rise Putnam was upon him with his ax raised and ready to strike.

"Ten thousand devils! I surrender," panted the officer in English. "Who are you? How many of you are there?"

"There was four of us," Putnam dryly answered, and he took the officer by the arm and led him limping back to the camp.

To his men he called out—

"Get that wounded man into the boat."

"He can't travel. Best end him," urged a ranger.

"He won't bother you any if you make it by boat," said Putnam, observing the wounded man was scarcely more than a youth. "If hard pressed and forced to take to the bush you can leave him for his friends to care for. Those are your orders."

He examined the wounded man, bandaged the hole in his thigh and assured him through the officer that there was no danger of his bleeding to death. The officer was searched, but no papers were found upon him. He informed Putnam that although he belonged with the colonial regulars this was his first scout with a small party.

"Did you meet Cap'n Pean on your way down?" Putnam asked.

The man eyed him blankly for a moment, then stiffly replied—

"I refuse to answer."

"You have answered," chuckled Putnam. "You haven't met him. But be careful at Fort William Henry. If you refuse to answer down there you'll be handed over to our Mohawks. And they have a rare way of making men talk.

"Now, men, this affair changes our plans. You must take these two men to the fort. Keep to the boat unless hard pressed. If you go ashore abandon the wounded man but take this other fellow with you. If he doesn't keep up, kill him."

"*M'sieur*, I shall exceedin'ly keep up," assured the officer solemly with a deep bow to Putnam.

"What about meeting you, cap'n?" anxiously asked a ranger.

"Come back here with a couple of boats and a dozen men. Wait for me two days. If I don't show up within that time report me as missing. Now you're off; and be careful in passing Long and Sloop Islands."

Silently the boat moved away with the rangers and their prisoners.

CHAPTER X

IN THE HAY BARN

AFTER his men had started down the lake Putnam paddled across to the west shore and risked discovery by advancing eight miles, or until he came to Sabbath Day Point. This was familiar ground for him.

Here he found the remains of a fire, which he decided had been burning within the last twenty-four hours. Five couches of fir boughs led him to deduce that these were the same men as those whom he had raided at the Narrows. As there was no sign of the enemy he concealed the birch and after eating some of his cooked rations withdrew to a thicket and slept until late afternoon.

Scouting the point and surveying the lake, he saw nothing to occasion alarm, and although it lacked several hours of sunset he pulled out the canoe and resumed his journey down the lake. He still kept to the west shore, as here were islets and coves among which he could seek shelter if the enemy appeared and gave pursuit.

He realized that while affording him a hiding-place each cover might be a trap, but that was a risk he must take. He was determined to reach the Carrying-Place that evening.

When he came to the bare and savage steeps of Rogers' Rock he took a supreme risk by cutting diagonally across to the east shore and landing at the entrance of the Second Narrows, as the connecting stream between George and Champlain was called. Now he was in the enemy country, where French partizan and red ally were continually scouting back and forth; and wo to the ranger who was caught napping!

He hid his canoe, set off due north and traveled until he struck into the Carrying-Place trail. This path, he knew, ended at some sawmills on the rapids in the immediate neighborhood of Ticonderoga.

Following it for about a mile, he swung off to the east and made for a mountain which stood within three miles of the French fort. He knew the ground from previous reconnaissances and had no difficulty in following his course despite the fact that night was settling down and obliterating the landmarks.

After several hours of rough travel he came to the slope of the mountain, and being well satisfied with his progress he found a thick covert and placidly went to sleep. He was aroused in the morning by the sound of voices. Peeping from his hiding-place, he beheld two savages, tall, stalwart men and less ferocious of countenance than the Western Indians or the Caughnawaga Iroquois.

One rested his foot on a rock as he bent over to examine the ground. Putnam observed that he was wearing moosehide moccasins, and at once decided they were Abnaki, either from Canada or from the Penobscot River in the extreme East.

Although less sanguinary than the Iroquois the New England settlers had learned full well their implacable severity in conducting war. While given to treating female captives kindly their inventions in torturing the males left them little to learn from Ottawa or Huron.

Putnam considered them a sturdier foe than the Potawatomi and other western tribes, whose gross superstitions made them victims to many absurd whims. These were grim, dour warriors, who had paid tribute to the Mohawks and yet could wage battle as stoutly as the Keepers of the Eastern Door had they possessed the capacity of holding themselves together as a unit.

The two had happened upon a trace of the trail left by the ranger and were considering it. Used to following signs through the gloomy depths of their ancient evergreen forests, they had quickly observed where a white man had boldly made his way up the slope.

They were curious, but not suspicious. None would look for an enemy so close to Fort Ticonderoga. But being possessed of abundant leisure and accustomed to follow any trail that was not perfectly obvious, they might have stumbled upon the ranger had not friendly fortune interposed.

The situation was saved by a Canadian, who had followed a bear up the mountain and had remained the night, thinking to resume the pursuit in the morning. Now he came down the slope, singing a lively love-song, and passed within a rod of Putnam.

On beholding the Indians he gave them a boisterous greeting and passed on. They glanced at his moccasins, found that they agreed with the trail, grunted to each other and resumed their way to the lake.

Putnam removed his thumb from the hammer of his gun and breathed in relief. If surprized he had had no doubt as to his ability to dispose of the two intruders, but the encounter would arouse the hornets' nest in Ticonderoga and he would have been obliged to flee without accomplishing his great purpose.

Once they were out of sight he produced his supply of food and devoured half of it and then began his ascent of the mountain. Gaining the summit, he began a careful inspection of the fort and outworks, and sought to estimate the number of men in the masses of humanity he could discern at drill.

He also made careful notes of the great abatis and the advanced post where he and Rogers had obtained the kettle of beans. Becoming very thirsty, he descended the mountain toward the lake, taking great care to keep under cover as it was customary for

the French lookouts to employ spy-glasses in searching the surrounding country.

He reached the foot of the mountain and found himself close to three cabins and a larger structure which he believed was a hay-barn. Finding a pool of water, he quenched his thirst and opened his rations only to discover that the small quantity of meat left had spoiled. He was undecided whether to return to the mountain or to forage for food.

His natural common sense would have influenced him to tighten his belt and fast at least until night had he not now beheld a most tantalizing spectacle. A Canadian emerged from one of the cabins, eating something.

"Looks like roast fowl," muttered Putnam, his mouth watering. "Most likely wild duck. —— me, I believe it is duck!"

He watched the man enter the hay-barn. Very shortly the man reappeared in the door, held up a jug and began calling to invisible comrades. After a minute a man stuck his head from a cabin and another man came from behind the third cabin. These two gaily called back to the man with the jug and hastened to join him. The three entered the barn and closed the door.

This was Putnam's chance; and, darting across the small plot sown to squash and pumpkins, he reached the middle cabin unobserved and bolted through the door. For a moment he was nonplused, believing that he was in the presence of the dead, and a mummy at that, so withered and shrunken was the figure in the box bunk. But the eyes flickered.

Putnam glided forwarded, but the face of the aged man betrayed no fear. Putnam placed a knife at the scraggy, wrinkled throat, but not a muscle of the parchment face moved.

Putnam now noticed the contracted appearance of the muscles on one side of the face, and knew the man was suffering from a shock and that it was impossible for him to move. With a flush of shame he put up the knife and asked—

"Speak English?"

The man's eyes showed no intelligence. "*Parlez Français?*" demanded Putnam.

Lights sprang up in the black eyes and then died out.

PUTNAM believed him to be helpless, yet he kept an eye on him as he rummaged about the small room. In a kettle by the fireplace he found a savory mess, a huge fricassee of duck. He fished out a breast and devoured it on the spot, throwing the bones into the back of the fireplace. Two plump drumsticks followed. With the edge taken off his hunger, he found a roll of dressed leather and in this placed what remained of the duck.

Happening to glance toward the bunk, he beheld a strange, tense glitter in the paralytic's eyes, and it came to him that the man was listening, waiting for something. Springing to the door, he opened it a crack and looked toward the barn. The three men were just coming out. They had made no sound that Putnam had heard, and yet the ranger believed the paralytic had heard them.

At the end of the cabin was a square hole covered by a blanket. Stepping to this, Putnam found he had a clear field, and with the roll of duck under his arm he slipped through and carefully rearranged the blanket behind him.

The three men, talking volubly, now approached the cabin and at the earnest exhortations of the owner entered. No sooner were they inside and the door closed than the ranger passed back of the cabin and ran to the rear of the barn.

As he ran he heard fragments of wild cries of dismay when the host opened his kettle and found that several fat ducks had vanished. It was pronounced to be devil's work. It was useless to question the ancient. With their nerves in a jangle the invitation to return to the brandy was gladly accepted.

In the meanwhile Putnam had heard voices of men to the east of the barn, and not wishing to be caught between them and the three men in the cabin, he darted inside the barn and glanced about for a hiding-place. Half the space was stacked with hay to the roof. There was no chance to conceal himself unless he took refuge in a stall next to the door.

The stall was narrow, and while but vaguely lighted it would be a poor retreat to be discovered in. Just now it was empty, but the horse might be led in at any time.

There were several moth-eaten bearskins hanging on the walls. He rapidly canvassed these as affording a possible hiding-place, only to decide that the outline of his figure would be too pronounced, let alone the discomfort of remaining motionless behind them.

The sound of voices close to the door dissolved his hesitation. He could not leave the barn without being seen. Snatching a bearskin from its peg, he threw it over his head, entered the stall and crouched on his heels. Being in deep shadow, with the brown pelt tending to eliminate the outlines of his figure, he hoped to remain unnoticed. A dog yapped. The voices were at the door.

Wishing to fight on a full stomach if fight he must, Putnam unrolled the dressed leather and selected a leg. The door opened and the three Canadians entered. The mystery of the vanishing duck still worried them. It was common knowledge that the Foul Fiend might appear anywhere at any time in any guise.

With a wealth of violent gesticulations the host of the day described his emotions on

discovering his loss. His pantomime was so excellent that Putnam, peeping from under a flap of the skin, had no trouble in following it. A broad smile spread over his face as he imagined the scene in the cabin. The jug was unearthed from under the hay, and there followed three periods of prolonged gurgling as the men in turn crooked their elbows.

The conversation was resumed and reflected the effect of the jug. Putnam smiled scornfully. There could be no danger from three frightened and drunken men. He pushed back the skin that he might get more air and proceeded to finish his drumstick.

Now entered a new element. The puppy that had been yapping outside dashed upon the half-intoxicated trio and pretended to be very savage in worrying their feet. One of them kicked it aside and the solemn, bibulous conversation was continued.

The puppy, disconsolate that no one would play with him, whimpered for a bit, then pricked up an ear and rolled his eyes. He had scented the Great Adventure. The men, now talking all together, each trying to drown out the other two, gave the bundle of fat no heed, as in response to some ancestral jungle traits he began stalking the stall.

Putnam scowled as he beheld the fat form slowly approaching. But he smiled at the tiny growl as the puppy reached the entrance of the stall and paused before the fearful shadows.

He might have abandoned his investigation of this stange man-smell if not for a new discovery. And the small nose wrinkled and sniffed with great enthusiasm. The lust for hunting out the stranger; also all fear of the shadows vanished. For he was breathing in the good cabin smell and the heavenly aroma of the duck.

With complete confidence in the stall the puppy yapped exultingly and hurled himself forward. Putnam caught him by the nap of the neck but let him go when he began to ki-yi. The three men failed to notice the outcry as they now had reached the contradictory stage as to the manners and habits of Satan in walking the earth, the owner of the jug arguing loudly against the two.

To still the puppy Putnam rubbed his nose against the drumstick, whereat the pup grabbed blindly and secured a breast with all its bony substructure and bolted from the stall.

The disputant was bitterly proclaiming his guests to be ingrates when the puppy emerged from the stall and settled himself to enjoy his feast. With a flood of invective the man was denouncing his companions, waving both arms and endangering the jug which a hand still clutched, when his wild gaze happened to fall upon the dog and to note his occupation.

He ceased his drunken arraignment and for a moment stood motionless and silent, his eyes protruding. Then he shrieked—

"*Nom de Dieu!*"

And he pointed a trembling finger at the contented diner.

"*Sacre!* The stolen duck!" cried one of his companions.

"By St. Denis, but he is a queer dog to steal it from a boiling kettle!" gasped the third man.

"Pig! Stealer of ducks!" began the man with the jug.

But the preceding speaker gestured for silence and whispered—

"Devil's dog."

"Accursed thief!" passionately cried the man with the jug. "Your master, Gros Pierre, shall pay for the ducks!"

And he dramatically advanced, shaking an accusatory finger at the puppy.

THE brave spirit of his fathers told the puppy he must defend his skill, and he gave voice to a tiny g-r-r-r. This diminutive defiance sent the Canadian staggering back against the hay.

Superstition and a heritage of terrible legends promptly seized upon his imagination. His companion had said it was a "devil's dog." It was a devil's dog. No; it was the Evil One himself, cunningly hiding in that roll of fat. Form and size meant nothing. The Evil One could work his will through the instrumentality of a tiny worm.

This pet of Gros Pierre's appeared to be a puppy. But how could a puppy rifle a boiling kettle of its contents without upsetting it? How could he do this and then replace the cover? And did not the paralytic grandfather's eyes try to tell a terrible secret? God in heaven! At night the fell beast might transform itself into a ravening wolf.

"Devil's dog!" shivered the man whose suspicions were the first to be aroused.

Ah! Now the Beast was parting with his secret. He could not keep the devil's light from shining through his eyes. The three men crossed themselves. One hoarsely whispered he must be slain by fire. Another insisted the head must be cut off as a sure preventive of the evil assuming another form.

The puppy growled contentedly over his feast.

"We shall make sure by using both blood and fire," choked out the owner of the jug as he reached to the wall and secured an ax.

His companions edged toward the door, their potations permitting them to anticipate all sorts of horrible transformations once the ax forced the Spirit from its hiding-place. With an inarticulate roar the man swung the ax and rushed toward the puppy.

A heavy stamping of feet at the door and a loud voice calling out blasphemies disturbed the man's technique, and the ax fell wide of its

victim. Now the puppy realized his danger, and, remembering only the kindly hand that had fed him the delectable duck, he scampered whimpering into the stall.

The man with the ax regained his balance, his eyes bulging with a fear that bordered on madness. The man at the door ceased his blasphemy and led in a horse. He was astounded at the tableau. He harshly cried:

"Ho, Le Petit Jean! So you drink till you would kill your good friends. *Parbleu*, but you're a nice fellow! Drop the ax, madman."

"He fights the devil, not us, good Pierre," hastily corrected one of the men.

"The devil is in the stall. He steals hot duck from a boiling kettle. The fires of hell shine in his eyes," hurriedly added the third man.

"He has taken the form of a little dog. The little white dog with the black eye you call the Rogue," whispered the executioner.

The man with the horse roared in rage, and at last managed to warn—

"Now may the devil take you three worthless ones if you have hurt my little Rogue!"

"But the devil is in him!" screamed the man with the ax. "I, Little Jean, have seen the Evil One looking from his eyes."

And he crossed himself and groaned dismally; for sorry the fate of him who had passed under the Evil Eye.

The dog's owner became shaken. His anger was strongly leavened with superstition. After all it was a well known and fully authenticated fact that Satan took on most deceiving guises.

He hesitated, then whistled faintly to the dog and stepped back toward the door. The puppy, his nose deep in the débris of the fricassee, paid no attention to the call. The horse, finding himself released, made for the stall.

"See! The horse knows there is nothing to fear," hoarsely said the man at the door.

But the horse by this time had detected the unfamiliar shape at the head of the stall and was hearing the worrying sounds made by the puppy. With a snort of alarm he backed from the stall.

The keen vision of the man by the door was as yet undimmed by brandy. Now he screamed:

"Our Lady help us and save us! There is something in there!"

Putnam knew that the climax had arrived. Pulling the bearskin over his head and grasping the gun by the barrel to be used as a club, he stood up, emitted a horrible roar and lunged toward the door. The terrified nag reared with a snort, and, clumsily pivoting, bolted through the door, knocking his owner prostrate.

The three drinkers were convinced the devil now had them for certainty as the huge, hairy form shot from the stall. A fat puppy had retired there to change into this fearful monster. With terrific screams they tumbled over each other in making for the door. Once outside they cast off their drunkenness and ran like deer for the lake.

Putnam threw aside the skin and waited until they were out of view. Then, seeing that the way was clear, he made to leave, only to be deterred by a whimpering note and something soft falling against his legs. He glanced down and beheld the puppy, an animated ball of rejoicing at having found such a good friend.

"They'll burn him and do lots of things to drive out the bad spirit," mused Putnam as he stared down into the small, beady eyes. "You poor little varmint, guess you won't be much of a load."

And he picked the puppy up, dropped him into the bosom of his belted shirt and stepped through the door.

He had thought to run to the cover of the mountain, but found himself confronting an officer in the uniform of the French Regulars.

CHAPTER XI

THE ESCAPE FROM THE MOUNTAIN

"CAP'N PEAN, I believe," saluted Putnam after the two had stared at each other in astonishment for a moment. "Believe me, sir, I am mighty glad to meet you."

"*Mordieu!* The English Putnam!" exclaimed Pean, his haggard face lighting in cruel triumph. "It is the will of the good God. Come. We will walk to the lake and find a boat."

"And finding the boat?"

"We will go the fort, *m'sieur*."

"That would be neighborly of you, but it would be putting you out of your way. You've just come from there," said Putnam, beginning to thrill with the hope Pean had not yet delivered his budget of information.

"A thousand pardons, *mon ami*, but I am on my way there now. My story will sound so incredible in the chevalier's ears that I shall need you to vouch for it."

"I see. How is the wounded shoulder?"

"Bah! It was but a scratch. I have forgotten it. You ranger should hang for shooting so poorly when he had such an excellent target."

"I shall discipline him. Yet it is good. It makes me feel better. I hate like sin to kill a wounded man, and yet I'll be —— if I'm not going to try taking you a prisoner to Fort William Henry."

"*Zut!* You will show resistance?" softly queried Pean, his eyes glittering and a hand dropping to an Indian ax in his belt.

Putnam laughed harshly and cast a glance toward the lake. To his great relief he saw no signs of soldiers or Canadians. He realized

Pean was wishing to prolong the conversation until help should arrive.

Behind the Frenchman towered the mountain. A sharp run and he would be hidden on its wooded slopes. He still held his gun by the barrel. The Frenchman could use his ax before the gun could be raised and swung as a club.

"Shall we walk, my brave captain?" asked Pean.

"Your news is stale. It can wait. The lists you stole have been returned to headquarters, the 'riginal and the two copies. What you memorized will do Montcalm no good as we have shifted our troops."

"As I feared. But there are other informations."

"Of course. But Lord Loudoun will not move the army against Louisbourg this season."

"So?" loudly cried Pean, his voice strident and his face flushing. "I see you know too much. I think you have much to tell that will be new to us. I believe our red allies can coax you to tell all. Ahead of me. March!"

A shout from the direction of the lake announced the coming of men, but Putnam had no glances to waste. Pean's hand was gripping the ax more tightly.

They stood a dozen feet apart. By the contraction of the Frenchman's eyes the ranger knew that they would be at death grips in another few seconds. He dropped his hand down the gun-barrel, and as he did so Pean's visage became savage, and whipping out his ax he shouted:

"You refuse to surrender? Then die!"

He leaped backward and threw up his arm. On the point of hurling the ax he was thrown off his poise for an instant by the appearance of a small wrinkled face, white with a black eye, at the neck of Putnam's shirt. Then the arm swung forward just as Putnam dropped on his knee and one hand, the right hand cocking and discharging the gun.

The ax grazed the ranger's head; a splotch of dark red showed on the white breast of the officer's travel-stained coat. The puppy whimpered and Pean fell dead on his face. With a leap Putnam cleared his body and ran for the woods.

Behind him rose infuriated cries, but the fugitive took no time to look back. Several shots were fired, but all were poorly aimed.

Through the pumpkin-patch he raced, his feet tripping on the vines and nearly throwing him. From the bosom of his shirt rose a mournful protest. He reached the edge of the woods and dived into cover just as a long, wailing cry soared above the hoarse shouts of the Canadians.

"That will be the Abnaki, famous trailers," he panted, reaching for his twenty-inch powder-horn and measuring out a charge as he glided diagonally up the slope. "And that makes all the difference in the world." After reloading the piece he came to a narrow lane that extended far down the slope, where the ledge cropped out and defied even the tenacious evergreens to find holding-ground. He crossed this opening and halted behind a big fir. The puppy whined and licked the hand thrust in to quiet him.

"Poor little fellow," soothed Putnam, his kind heart ever pitying the helpless. "You don't know what to make of it all. If you could have your way the world would be nothing but play and boiled duck. But his Majesty and Louis the Fifteenth have different notions.

"Ah, now some one comes! And only the Indians. One—two—three. Not so bad as I'd feared. Pup, I'm going to shoot, but don't you be scared. We must put the fear of the Lord into them red trackers."

He could catch flitting glimpses of naked bodies as the warriors glided zigzag through the woods, moving from tree to tree and yet advancing swiftly, and bending low to read the trail on the forest floor. Three sinister figures, the personification of the forest's inexorable cruelty.

To shoot while they were yet within the woods meant a waste of powder. Putnam waited until they came to the opening and the leader glided into view and sought to find the trail on the naked ledge. The rocks left no signs of the ranger's passing, yet a tiny piece of moss torn from its fastenings told the whole story to the Indian.

Putnam covered him but waited until he straightened to his full height to call to his companions. With the bang of the gun the stricken brave leaped convulsively but made no outcry. His companions vanished like magic and raised a lugubrious howl, petitioning Kechi Niwaskw, their god of good, and the more powerful Machi Niwaskw, god of evil, to aid them in encompassing the death of this white man.

Putnam descended the slope a considerable distance before resuming his course round the mountain. He halted and loaded the gun and quieted the puppy, then proceeded at double speed to gain the western flank of the mountain. He came to the point where he had ascended the mountain and passed it without taking any pains to conceal his trail.

He ran on until he came out on a ledge. Springing from this, he caught the bough of a spruce, gently swung into the trunk and rapidly descended thirty feet to the ground.

Now he turned squarely back and with as much speed as exquisite caution permitted moved parallel to his trail. Reaching a point where his line of vision up the slope crossed his trail, he dropped behind a decaying log and sighted his gun on a birch.

THE day was drowsily warm. A squirrel ran down a tree and "froze" on beholding the figure by the log. The puppy thrust his head from the ranger's shirt and on seeing the squirrel yapped ecstatically. Growling beneath his breath, Putnam thrust the puppy back. The squirrel ran up the tree, and, vibrating mightily, began shrilly proclaiming to all forest folks that an enemy was near.

With a grunt of disgust Putnam slipped from his ambush and retreated farther down the slope. This time he was careful to keep the puppy inside his shirt. He could not see the birch he had intended to use as a range-finder, but he could see the log he had abandoned.

Perhaps it was well he shifted his position, for as he watched a scalp-lock, then a painted face, suddenly showed above the log. This tracker saw the spot where Putnam had crouched, read the story of the fugitive's withdrawal, then darted his gaze down the slope.

Instinct warned him he was trapped. He started to jerk his head below the log, but was not quick enough; and the explosion of the smooth-bore was his death sentence, the heavy ball catching him between the eyes.

"If they was Ottawas or Menominees the third man might quit till help come along," muttered Putnam, lying on his side and dexterously reloading. "But being a Abnaki the third man'll stick just like he was a Mohawk."

This time he rammed home several buckshot in addition to the ball.

He could visualize what was going on between the mountain and Ticonderoga. Long since the alarm had been given and the dead body of Captain Pean identified. In a terrible rage the French soldiery were being thrown about the mountain, with all available Indians being sent up the slopes to kill or drive the lone scout into the open.

Had it been night Putnam would have considered his chances most excellent, but to evade the horde of red trailers soon to be hot on his heels and at the same time break through the cordon of soldiers sure to be thrown between him and Lake George would call for all his cunning and more than an average amount of good luck. He could not afford to tolerate any avoidable handicap; and the puppy with his whimpering and yapping was a great source of danger. Yet, so stubborn was the ranger's spirit, and so enduring were the qualities of kindness and mercy which ever characterized his gallant soul, he never thought to abandon the squirming bunch for the wild creatures of the mountainside.

Also he believed the puppy had done him good service in the hay-barn. Loyalty impelled him to save the dog.

This decision precluded his indulging in hide and seek, a game at which he was the past master. Speed was imperative. He could not wait to pick off the third Abnaki. It was a race between him and the men sent to encircle the mountain.

Tightening his belt, he resumed his flight down the slope, and it was not until he neared the foot of the slant that he found it necessary to lessen his speed. Peculiarly enough it was a squirrel that warned him. When he heard the indignant chattering on his right he knew he must stop and reconnoiter although Death was tagging his steps.

He crawled under the low hanging boughs of a dwarf spruce and stared intently toward the evergreen where the squirrel was raging. A crow left the top of a ragged pine and flopped heavily toward the fort. His cunning eyes had noted an intrusion near the foot of his lofty perch.

Putnam waited a full minute and on observing nothing shifted his gaze to examine the cover between him and the lake. He had no intention of venturing into the Carrying-Place trail.

A slight movement in some bushes a dozen feet away caused him to whirl and glare along the brown gun-barrel. The agitation instantly ceased, then was repeated a bit farther away.

For a moment he was greatly puzzled. Then a low oath slipped through his clinched teeth as he realized the bosom of his shirt was quiet. The puppy had tumbled or crawled out and was questing forth for adventures.

"Dern his fat little hide! He's killed hisself," murmured Putnam, watching anxiously the progress of the runaway by noting the occasional disturbance of twigs and the low branches.

But now was created a new focus for his attention. From some silver birch just below him and squarely in his path to the lake emerged the naked and freshly oiled figure of an Indian. Behind him followed another, and then another. The three of them had detected the slight rustling in the undergrowth and fancied that they had located their victim.

Two of them were armed with bows and arrows. The third trailed a gun, and Putnam put him down for a Caughnawaga Iroquois and his companions for being from some Western tribe.

The puppy, busily exploring the tiny entrance to the home of a woods mouse, gave an excellent imitation of big game in hiding. The agitation of the bushes was very slight.

Up the slope crept the Indians, their course taking them north of Putnam's hiding-place. The puppy, tired of that particular clump of bushes, made his way to another; and again the telltale movement of a branch betrayed his advance.

The red men interpreted it as being the white man's effort to retreat up the mountain.

They changed their formation and advanced abreast of each other.

This maneuver brought the one with the gun close to Putnam's covert; and the ranger's lips clamped together like a trap as he appreciated his advantage. Gently relinquishing his rifle, he drew his ax and gradually worked to his knees.

On crawled the Mohawk, his beady eyes glued on the spot where the puppy was conducting further investigations. The three were now strung out with wide intervals between so as to close in from three sides, leaving only the eastern side open. If the prey escaped in that direction he would be forced to return up the mountain and into the hands of the Abnaki.

Now the Mohawk was so close that Putnam could hear his deep breathing. His sinuous movements were practically noiseless. Drawing up the left knee, he would place the right hand holding the gun ahead. Then the right knee and left hand were likewise advanced.

Like some wonderfully efficient and thoroughly oiled piece of mechanism he came to the edge of the ranger's hiding-place. The brown hand holding the gun fell into position almost under Putnam's nose. The weight of the body was partly resting on it as the left hand was being put ahead.

It was at that precise moment that Putnam's arm shot from the bushes and brought the ax down on the back of the brave's neck, the force of the blow almost severing the head. And as the blow landed, and before the other Indians could comprehend the situation the gun was caught up from the dead hand and discharged at the nearest savage.

He came to his knees, screaming, drilled through from side to side. The survivor began rolling under some cedars; but with his own gun and its generous charge of buckshot Putnam got him as he was flopping from sight.

THE two explosions and the terrible death-cry sadly frightened the puppy. He came rolling down the slope, his small soul exhausting itself in shrill howls.

"You derned nuisance!" growled Putnam, snatching up the white, fluffy form with its ridiculous black eye and stuffing it into his shirt.

Then he appropriated the Mohawk's gun, ran to the foot of the slope and took time to load both weapons. From the mountain and from the north came the yells of the militia as they swarmed through the woods. Threading this general clamor together was the ululating signals of the red allies.

With a gun in each hand Putnam ran at right angles to the enemy sweeping down on his right, or from the north. He heard the disappointed howls of the red men who were descending the mountain and who were now meeting the reenforcements cutting in from the north to head the fugitive off. They had shaken out the bag and the quarry had escaped.

But the chase was far from being ended. There could be but one way open to the ranger; and the pack, in full cry, made for Lake George.

"I like a straight run bettern' being boxed up between two or three bunches of the varments," Putnam confided to the penitent puppy as he sped like a deer for the water.

On his immediate right he could hear the soldiers excitedly talking as they followed along the Carrying-Place trail. The fact that they stuck to the trail gave him confidence. They must be regulars, as the militia would have taken to the bush to rout him out.

He could mark the progress of the pursuit as the savages descended the slope and sounded their view-halloa as they met with bands coming round the mountain. The answering calls finally ceased, and he knew that all his pursuers were at his back with the swiftest of foot racing in a dead line to reach the lake ahead of him. As he was convinced that none of the enemy was abreast of him on his left he bore off to the southwest, although this course would bring him out far below the spot where he had concealed his canoe.

At last through an opening he sighted the blue water and slowed down to a walk to ease his aching lungs. Cautiously gaining the edge of the shore, he found he had emerged directly below a narrow point.

Three canoes were drawn up on the beach. As he prepared to make a dash for one of these two Indians came out of the woods, filled kettles with water and leisurely went back. It was obvious that these and the band they were camping with had not as yet learned of the white fugitive.

He waited until they had disappeared from sight, then ran to the canoes and with his knife spoiled two beyond repair. Placing his two guns and the puppy in the third, he dropped it into the water and seized the paddle.

Paddling with all his power, he made across the lake diagonally. The puppy waddled and rolled about in the bottom of the canoe and whined dolefully at first; then became an optimist and curled up with his head between his white paws and slept.

Putnam traveled so swiftly that when a faint howl warned him that he had been discovered the men running along the shore were only dots. They were sure to find canoes speedily, and the Canadian Mohawks, like their pagan brothers in the Long House, were among the best boatmen in North America.

However, his great lead stilled any fear of being captured on the water. Already the long, bare slopes of Rogers' Rock towered ahead;

and if need be he could take the wild gorges and hidden gullies back of this.

But land travel did not appeal to him, and as Sabbath Day Point was not more than ten miles away he was determined to keep within striking distance of shore and make it by canoe if possible. He steered a course that took him behind the numerous islands, expecting at any moment to run into an ambush of some wandering scouting band.

Once he saw a smoke ashore and placed a long island between himself and it. None of Rogers' men would make a smoke so far down the lake.

By sunset he rounded the point, concealed the canoe and went ashore. His unusual exertions had told on his iron muscles; and although he was within seven or eight miles of the appointed rendezvous at North West Bay he knew he must rest before making it.

The puppy whined and whimpered and altogether was a nuisance. Putnam eyed him grimly, then smiled broadly at the silly, wrinkled face.

"Guess, pup, you like to live like other folks," he solemnly remarked as he pressed deeper into the woods in search of a resting-place. "You ain't intended for a ranger; but if you'd stayed behind they'd barbecued you in fancy fashion to drive the devil out."

The puppy licked his hand and wagged its stubby tail.

Putnam knocked over a squirrel with his ax and gave it to his pet to worry, saying:

"There's victuals for you. But what you need is milk. Well, if we're lucky we'll get where we can find some milk sometime."

With this promise he threw himself on a bank of moss and fell asleep. When he awoke it was dark and the dog was curled up under his chin.

Without moving, the ranger listened for several minutes and satisfied himself that no enemy was lurking near. Stuffing the dog into his shirt, he stole back to the canoe.

As he was about to put the birch in the water his nose detected the pleasing aroma of woodsmoke. Placing his cap in the canoe, he dropped the puppy into it and turned inland to reconnoiter, scouting through the woods to the northern side of the point.

He traveled a quarter of a mile and came upon several fires. The lavish use of fuel would have told him that no red men built the fires even if he had not heard the careless conversation of the soldiers.

For nearly half a minute he watched them with contempt twisting his lips. Then he stiffened and half-raised his gun as a tall savage abruptly glided from the black forest wall and stood among the soldiers and briefly addressed an officer.

The ranger studied this newcomer with great respect. He carried a gun and had the Bear totem painted on his chest.

He talked in French to the officer, and Putnam knew he must come from the Caughnawaga village and was either a Mohawk or an Oneida, the converted Iroquois being largely from these two nations.

The savage seemed to be alone, and what he reported brought a sharp order from the officer. Men sprang from the ground and began buckling on their accouterments.

A second order sent a squad hurrying to the boats, while six men with the officer in the lead followed the Indian directly toward Putnam's hiding-place. The ranger fell back and, striking into a path, ran as fast as the darkness would permit until he came to his canoe.

Leaping in, he paddled swiftly to get among the islands just south of the point. The Indian had discovered something which made him believe that Putnam was hiding on the point. Possibly he had heard the puppy complaining and had located the canoe.

Refreshed by his nap, Putnam made good time up the lake until he was at the mouth of North West Bay. Tongue Mountain cut the sky on the right. The canoe nosed its way round the tip of the point, the ranger wondering if his men were waiting for him in the deep bay. The puppy lifted his head and barked. Instantly the challenge rang out—

"Who comes?"

"Israel Putnam and a fool dog."

"Is it really you, cap'n?"

"You should know my voice," testily replied Putnam, sending his canoe ahead.

"I thought I did; but the dog?"

"Prisoner I fetched along," soberly replied Putnam. "How many men?"

"Twenty, with Major Rogers."

"Then hooray for us!" softly cried Putnam. "Lead the way."

"I must stay here. Major's orders. Keep on till you pass the island and you'll see the camp-fire. And, cap'n, we had to leave that derned wounded Frenchman in the boat when two bateaux and some canoes piled down on us from Sloop Island."

"You remembered my orders and didn't kill him?" sternly questioned Putnam.

"Kill him? Lordy, no. He sent some word to you in French. One of the boys said it was that he was much obleeged to you."

PUTNAM dug his paddle deep, soon rounded one of the two islands that partly choked the mouth of the bay and came in sight of a small fire. A sentry sharply challenged him, and figures of sleepers suddenly became armed men erect and ready for a fight. Putnam called out his name and jumped ashore.

Major Rogers came down to the beach to

greet him, and to him Putnam hurriedly reported:

"Band of Canadian regulars camping at Sabbath Day Point. An Indian scout got some trace of me and they was hunting for me when I quit the point."

"Do they know you came up here?"

"Don't think they have the slightest notion where I went to."

"Good," said Rogers calmly. "I've two whale-boats and a wall-piece. We'll go and find the gentlemen. Swing your packs to the boats, men."

"I'll scout ahead in my canoe," said Putnam.

"That's for you to decide, but there's some business waiting for you. Where's Brant?"

Rogers had scarcely put the query when a slim form emerged from the woods and the Mohawk boy stood beside Putnam.

"For you," he said, extending a hand.

As Putnam took the piece of paper the puppy thrust his head from the ranger's shirt. With a little guttural cry of delight the boy drew him forth and stared admiringly at the white woolly little form with its eccentric black markings.

Putnam kneeled by the fire and opening the paper read:

> CAPTAIN ISRAEL PUTNAM, by hand of the boy JOSEPH BRANT:
>
> Ephraim Willis is a prisoner in the hands of the Potawatomi. If you can come to help me rescue him, come alone with Joseph Brant. I will wait for you a certain time. If you do not come I shall go alone.
>
> The band is returning home through Canada. As they have deserted the French there are no French officers with them to secure Mr. Willis' release.
>
> If they were Caughnawaga warriors I would be safe to go among them. But I shall go if you do not come. Bring no one with you, as cunning, not force, must be used. ELIZABETH LIDINDICK.

"If that ain't a dish of bad luck!" groaned Putnam.

"Young Brant said there was work for you to do, but he didn't explain what, and there's no making an Indian talk. What is it?" asked Rogers.

"My neighbor, Ephraim Willis, is laid by the heels by the Potawatomi. The Lidindick girl sends for me to come and get him out of the scrape. Says I must come alone, or she'll try it single-handed."

"Better she tie a rock round her neck and jump into the lake than to fall into the power of those Western Indians," growled Rogers. "I'll split my force. You can have half."

"Captain Putnam must come alone if I lead him to the Laughing One," coldly spoke up young Brant.

"Yes, yes, major. This is a case where numbers don't count," sighed Putnam. "An army couldn't rescue Willis alive. All I ask is that some one take charge of this puppy. He ought to have some milk. I've risked my hair getting the little fool down here from Ticonderoga; but he saved my pelt and I owed him that much."

And he nodded toward the dog, which was now on the ground and making a brave show of ferocity in attacking young Brant's moccasins.

Rogers smiled at Putnam's simplicity in believing he owed loyalty to a puppy and somewhat impatiently remarked—

"With your friend's life at stake and a party of Frenchmen waiting to be captured or run off the lake I guess we won't have much time to think about dogs."

"I will take the dog to his mother," spoke up young Brant.

"To his mother? That would be a dangerous job," said Putnam. "You'd never get within six miles of Ticonderoga without losing your hair. Even if the pup was back there they'd kill him. They seem to think he's chuck full of some devil."

The boy quietly continued:

"The Blind Seneca is a few miles to the west of us. I passed his camp coming here. One of his dogs has little ones. She will give this one milk."

He paused thoughtfully to study the puppy's strenuous efforts to chew his moccasins, his eyes sparkling with approval as the little beast growled with miniature ferocity.

"Yes, this one will be strong and big. He has great courage. Some of his children will be all white. He will never disgrace his new mother. He is too young for meat. He will die soon if he doesn't have milk! *Kul*"

The last in applause as the puppy gave a wrench and untied a moccasin fastening with her teeth.

"Blind Seneca," mused Putnam. "I've heard a heap about him. Didn't know he was in this country. But he isn't really blind."

"The Indians say he has been touched by the Great Spirit, or he'd 'a' been killed long ago. Crazy's a loon. That's why they call him blind. If he comes round this lake we'll have to wipe him and his —— pack of dogs out. Regular nuisance. Now we must be off."

"Mighty sorry I can't go with you, major," sighed Putnam. "They may be on the way here. Keep both eyes open and shoot first."

With that he picked up his gun and presented the captured Mohawk piece to young Brant. The boy picked up a blanket, and, holding it by the corners, placed the dog inside and slung it over his shoulder, then made into the Western woods.

CHAPTER XII

THE BLACK PACK'S LAST HUNT

"WHERE are you leading me?" asked Putnam after he had followed the boy along a rough trail for an hour.

"To a lake. We are half-way there."

"Are the Indians camped near there?"

"The girl is there."

"Where are the Potawatomi?"

"They are making for the Hatirontaks."

"Adirondacks, eh?"

"They will pass between the mountains and Champlain and strike into Canada. They do not want to meet any French soldiers as they have no belly for fighting. They do not want to swing very far from the lake for fear of meeting my people. If it were not for the Laughing One the pig should roast. He struck me, a Mohawk."

"If you hadn't knifed him through the leg, you young ——, he'd never been caught," growled Putnam.

"If you hadn't scalped the Potawatomi medicine-man your friend wouldn't now be waiting to go into their kettles," jeered the boy.

"What in sin do you mean by such talk?"

"The Potawatomi lost their belly for fighting after you killed and scalped their medicine-man. They deserted the French to go home. They scouted west and south of this lake to get a few scalps to give to their new medicine. And the ranger ran into their hands."

"What was he doing?"

The boy refused to answer. Putnam asked several questions with the same lack of result. Suddenly the boy viciously muttered:

"Rogers had better talk soft about killing the Blind Seneca and his dogs. Let the whites fight each other and not stir up the Long House."

"We can't have a crazy man chasing our rangers with his wild dogs," said Putnam.

"Once he gets this little white dog he will go back to his people. His pack is black. With this puppy he can breed white dogs again, and the cloud will pass away from him."

Putnam had heard fragments of woods gossip about the Blind Seneca and his pets, but as the man had never wandered so far east before he had accepted him as part myth or as a greatly exaggerated fact. He was curious to learn more and asked several questions over the boy's shoulder. Young Brant was through with talking, however; and they traveled for an hour without further conversation.

At last Brant halted and gave a low signal. From the darkness at his very side there emerged a slim figure, and Putnam felt a hand rest on his arm. Instinctively he seized the hand, but found it small and slim, and sheepishly released it.

"The Laughing One moves like a lynx," approved the boy.

"It is really you, Captain Putnam?" came the tremulous query.

"Very much at your service when it concerns Ephraim Willis, ma'am."

"The moon will be up in another hour. If you had not arrived I should have gone alone," she whispered.

"You said I was to bring no one. You still think that's wise?"

"One of two things we must do," she replied with a click of her small feet. "We must rescue him by stealth, or you must risk capture by sending a ball through his brave heart. Oh, it is horrible! Horrible!"

"It may be very bad, but let's wait till we get to it," gravely advised Putnam. "What about this youngster?"

"He is not to go with us," she ruled.

"I am no boy," passionately protested young Brant. "I am a warrior. I have been on the war-path. I was by Chief Hendrick when he was stabbed to death. I am a Mohawk. You are in the country of my people. You can not say where a Mohawk shall go on his own land. I have a talk for the Blind Seneca; then I shall take care of the Laughing One."

"You will return to your people, Joseph Brant. You have served me well, but you can not go farther with me," said the girl.

"I have a talk for the Blind Seneca," haughtily repeated the boy. The dog gave a sleepy little bark as if approving. The startled girl whispered—

"What is it?"

Brant slung the blanket to the front and placed the soft bundle in her hands, and as she petted it explained—

"It is my talk to the Blind Seneca."

Then she felt the dog taken from her hands. The bushes rustled softly, and the boy was gone.

"We must hurry," said the girl, leading the way along an old trail.

"What do you know of this Blind Seneca?" asked Putnam, hoping to divert her thoughts from the tragedy ahead of them.

"He is a Seneca who refused to contribute a white dog as a sacrifice to Teharonhiawagon—the Sky-Holder. He refused to sacrifice according to their ancient custom to the conquerer of the Hunchback, Hadui—Disease and Death—although he had many dogs. He would have fared ill—horribly—but was said to be touched by Teharonhiawagon.

"He fled to the forests, keeping far north near the foot of Ontario. His white dogs must have been killed off by wolves, for it soon became known that his pack was black.

"For two years he has wanted to go back to his people, but dares not till he can carry a pure white dog for the New Year's sacrifice. So he

wanders the forests, hoping a white dog will appear in a litter."

Putnam rapidly told of the puppy's adventures and explained that he was nearly white. The girl resumed:

"The Blind Seneca will be overjoyed to receive him. He will care for him most tenderly, hoping to breed a white strain that will remove the anger of the Sky-Holder.

"Twice I have seen him running through the forest with his brutes—two leaders on a leash, the others following close. Once they got away from him and I stayed in a tree till he came and called them off. He made me come down first, however, and said I was not to fear the dogs. Then he made them know me. Now I'm not afraid of them."

"Never knew Indian dogs was dangerous," skeptically mused Putnam.

"Oh, these are entirely different from the Indian curs. Very big and powerful. Mastiff strain, I think. My father said the Blind Seneca got the first pair while visiting Albany with a delegation from the Long House. They are terrible beasts."

"Now we feel better acquainted, will you kindly tell me about my friend?" abruptly asked Putnam.

"Last night he was captured near here. I was ahead, watching him searching the woods."

"Searching for you," sternly accused Putnam.

"May the good God forgive me, yes."

"You led that poor boy into an Indian trap——"

"Stop!" she hissed, her face so close to his that he jerked back his head and blinked his eyes at the darkness.

"But you hid from him—kept him chasing you," he persisted.

"I hid from him, led him on, yet ran from him—because I love him." There was no angry vehemence in her voice now; and he knew she was weeping.

His heart, tender as a woman's, was instantly touched by her silent grief. The voice that thundered and roared in battle and was worth many guns, now became gentle and caressing; and the thick, muscular hand that found her slim shoulder and patted it soothingly was as light and soft as a mother's.

"We're on different sides of the fence, ma'am," he murmured. "But I've climbed over to your side to help Eph Willis out of this hole. Tell me what you think the savages plan."

"They will torture him hideously," she whispered. "After he was captured I crept near and could have shot two or three of them, but that would have meant death for him. There was about a score of them. They had their packs, and I knew they were making for home, sick of the fighting.

"I knew that unless attacked they would take Willis along with them until they could make a safe camp and take their time in killing him. Such a place would be at the foot of the Adirondacks."

"I—I called out to him. You heard me call to him once. I said it again, even if it be to my shame. I told him I loved him and was following to save him.

"The Indians ran to find me. I was making for the lake to get a canoe and find you or Major Rogers when Joseph Brant cut across my trail, coming from the West. I've known the boy nearly all his life. I've been among his people often. They rather like me. My father always said I could drive a better bargain with them than he could.

"Young Brant held a torch while I wrote the message. That is all, except we must hurry and overtake them by the time they make their camp at the mountains."

"If you'd gone to the fort they'd clapped you under guard and sent you to Albany. Young woman, you've raised hob for the provinces. I'll work with you to get Willis clear; but after that you'll either quit your forest-running and sending news to Vaudreuil, or you'll get into some lasting trouble."

"It is my right. I am not ashamed of what I do. France is my country. I'm like the Mohawks; I trace my blood through the mother," she muttered.

"Cap'n Pean is dead. Killed, trying to take your information inside Ticonderoga."

She gave a little gasp, then firmly said:

"He died in his duty. He died clean, and he was not a good man. His death will make up for much. You risk your life daily, but luck was against him. Montcalm would give much to have you a prisoner."

"Or to have my hair at a Caughnawaga belt."

"But yes. It is the result of war. Men make all the wars. I will do what I can for France. It is written."

"Yet you love a Connecticut Yankee, one of your enemies," was the blunt reminder.

"True," she faltered. "The heart knows no country when it comes to love. My head tells me to love a Frenchman. I am helpless. M'sieu Willis is all that I always believed I could never tolerate. But behold! It is very queer."

"Derned queer," mumbled Putnam. "Not queer that any sensible woman should have a hankering for Willis, but that you, half-French, half-Dutch, against the provinces, should be taken with him."

She gave him no answer, and for several miles they pressed forward without speaking, the path very dark under the forest crown, the moon lighting the openings. At last she halted, and he asked how far they must travel before overtaking the Indians.

"They will make their camp in the first hills of the mountains, about twenty miles from

where you and Joseph Brant found me. We have come a fourth of the way. They are traveling much slower than we. They will have scouts out over their back trail. We must not follow too close.

"The rescue must be tried at night. I think we'd better sleep and take up the trail early in the morning.

"What particular plan have you thought up?"

"Not any. I will pray to Our Lady. The plan must grow out of what we find at the Indian camp."

He was alone. Feeling about at one side of the trail, he selected a bed of pine needles, but for once he could not command slumber. His thoughts ranged far into the forest, seeking Willis and worrying about his fate.

He blamed himself for not compelling the young man to accompany him instead of pursuing the girl; and this, although he knew only a bullet could have stopped the ranger's quest for this wild sprig of a forest-runner. Finally his lids closed.

THE touch on the shoulder brought him to his feet. It was the gray of early morning, with the sun yet hiding behind the eastern mountains. He stared at her intently until the color suffused her pale face.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he bruskly apologized, turning away and pretending to examine his gun; "but it's the first time I've had a square look at you in daylight. Still wearing them black clothes, I see."

"The others were too much like some of your rangers'. If captured I didn't want it said that I was wearing an enemy's clothes. I have some dried meat. We can eat by the brook beyond."

As he walked behind her and observed the slim figure she appeared very much of a child, very delicate and frail for the hazardous life she was living. There was a pathos in the small hands carrying the gun, in the small moccasins picking steps over fallen trunks and moss-covered rocks.

His great heart insisted that so sweet a creature was never intended for this wild questing, this roaming at night through gloomy and terror-haunted forests. And what spirit must animate her, what assurance and self-dependence to send her on the track of the savage Potawatomi!

The call of love was strong, and pioneer women of New England were renowned for their steady, level gaze when confronting horrible risks. But he knew of none among the splendid women in the colonies who had dared more than this chit of a maid was now venturing.

"You must be tired," he remarked.

His tone told her much, and she turned her head and flashed a friendly glance and a pathetic little smile. It was very pleasing to know she had such a companion for her task. There was none she would have chosen before him.

Love had been a great leveler; it had made friends of the redoubtable Israel Putnam and Vaudreuil's spy. She had never dreamed that white wampum could ever hang between her and this man.

"Not tired now," she replied. "Last night, yes. We will eat. Shall I or *m'sieu* serve?"

And she brought from under some firs a parcel containing the meat.

"You," he gravely decided.

He was fascinated to watch her daintiness in preparing him a strip of birch-bark for a plate, in apportioning him a share of the meat and in fashioning him a drinking-cup from a roll of bark.

"You can take care of yourself in the woods," he commented. "Are you never afraid?"

"Oh, often," she confessed. "Not at the trees nor the wolves, but when I am silly enough to remember some of the stories told in the Mohawk castles. The Iroquois have sad stories for nervous ears. Nothing of beauty and love, but always of dead men and giants and Flaming Heads."

"You slept here last night," he said, glancing toward the covert where she had procured the meat.

"It was wisest. I sleep so light. A leaf falling would awaken me, I believe. An outpost is always best, although I don't believe the Potawatomi will scout their back trail anywhere near this far."

"And now you plan what?".

"By dusk we must reach the neighborhood of their camp unseen and rescue M'sieu Willis this night. If he be still alive."

There was no longer any suggestion of the child. The lips were hard and straight, the eyes burning through their half-closed lids.

Putnam munched the tough meat and waited.

At last she murmured:

"He was kind to me in New York and saved me from great trouble. Afterward in Albany I mocked him. I played upon him to get information.

"Then—and this is very hard to tell—I struck him down from behind. May I be forgiven! My heart will never forgive me. I did not know it was he. But I struck him down. It was to rescue Captain Pean.

"Then when I looked on him lying there bleeding something broke in my heart. You don't mind my saying these things?"

"Bless you, no!"

"That is about all. You know what happened at the old fort. How he came to my rescue when he believed I was in danger. Oh, how my heart upbraided me when I was safe in

the woods and he was there, fighting in the darkness! You two were friends, but you might kill each other before you knew. So I called back to him. It was all I could do."

"And it made him disobey my orders and follow after you," sighed Putnam. "Well, I little thought I should ever work with you, young woman; but the Almighty's ways of doing things are strange. We should be going."

"It is time. We must scout carefully. They may be nearer than I've thought. It will never do to be discovered."

And she shivered and crossed herself; for both knew that premature discovery would send the ax into Willis' head.

At first she would have had Putnam follow some distance behind her, but after he had cast about on both sides of the beaten path, reading signs which the average ranger would have overlooked, she found a new respect for him and was glad to have him assume full responsibility for their advance.

Nothing occurred to disturb their cautious progress until late afternoon, when Putnam halted and pointed to a stick in the middle of the trail. It was two inches wide and about eight inches long.

On its flat surfaces were carved certain arbitrary characters, the first of which was heart-shaped. The girl stooped to pick it up as Putnam held back, but he caught her hand, and warned:

"Do not touch it. We must move back and leave no signs."

He retreated a rod and led the way into the thicket.

"How could a stick hurt us?" she protested.

"It can't hurt us. It may tell us things. It is one of the prayer-song sticks the Potawatomi use. The marks on it help them remember the prayer they wish to sing. I've seen a captive Potawatomi howling his song and following the signs with his fingers while some of our Mohawks were getting ready to roast him. The owner of that stick will come back for it unless the band is too far advanced on its way."

They waited until the girl grew worried.

"Joseph Brant would say it was the dead sorcerer's medicine to delay us until after Ephraim Willis is killed," she whispered.

"If no one shows up after I've slowly counted twenty we'll go on," surrendered Putnam.

He started his count and was not half through when the girl caught his arm, her small face seeming to be all eyes as she stared up the trail. A solitary Indian, coming at a trot, was running toward them. He carried a bow and arrows, and at first sight might be supposed to be wearing a black mask.

As he ran he swung his head from side to side and searched the ground. Then with a grunt of joy he observed the stick and pounced upon it and thrust it into his breech-clout string of beaten bark, and turned and raced swiftly up the trail.

With a sharp intake of the breath the girl poked her gun through the bushes and sighted it on the bounding figure. Putnam clamped a hand over the hammer before she could raise it.

"Are we to lose a chance of wiping out one of M'sieu Willis' captors?" she fiercely demanded.

"It would only hurry Willis to the stake," was the quiet reply. "The man's face is painted black. He is wearing mourning for the sorcerer I killed. He will wear it until Willis is killed.

"His black face makes me take new courage. The boy hasn't been harmed yet.

"If you had shot that Indian there would have been the risk of the gun being heard. If the band is too far away for that, then would be the wonder why the man did not come back. Either others would have been sent after him to discover where he fell and bled, or else they would be afraid, thinking him killed, and they would kill Willis offhand."

"You are right," she tremulously whispered. "I only saw a fiend that held my dear love prisoner."

"Recently one of your allies," he firmly reminded.

"No! Not one of my allies. France has used them, as it was either that or have the English use them.

"Let us be fair, Captain Putnam. I hate war. I hate all this cruelty, this killing of women and little children. What a beautiful country if men would only receive it from the hands of the good God and love it! God soon send the time when French and English can stand side by side and not face each other in battle. Oh, may God soon send that time!"

"Amen," softly murmured Putnam, deeply touched by her outburst.

THEY came to a hardwood growth that extended wedge shape up the slope and made a détour to escape treading on the carpet of last year's dead leaves. Entering the evergreens, they reached the top of the ridge and gazed down on the camp of the Potawatomi.

A natural abatis of prostrated trees and boulders lay between them and the fire. Already a blaze was necessary to oust the shadows in the gorge, as the sun was now setting and only the heights of the mountains retained the glory of the day.

The girl gave a little cry, then clapped a hand over her mouth and pointed a finger. But Putnam already had seen it—the figure of a man, naked to the waist and tied to a spruce which had been trimmed into a post. In the flickering half-lights there was no identifying the prisoner, but both the ranger and the girl knew it

must be Willis. The head was slumped forward on the breast and the whole body seemed to be sagging heavily.

"Is he already dead?" she asked with a half-strangled cry.

"He's tuckered out. He sleeps," whispered Putnam, scowling at the débris between them and the edge of the camp. "We're on the wrong side to attempt anything. We must go back and cross the mouth of the gorge and crawl along in the timber on the other side.

"See, they have their faces blacked. They haven't commenced on him yet."

More fuel was cast on the fire and the flare of the flames lighted the camp brilliantly. It also aroused the prisoner, who slowly lifted his head and stared around at the warriors.

Seeing that he was awake, an Indian ran to him and seized one of his hands which was tied to his side. He bent over it to bite off a finger-nail.

The girl groaned as she guessed the horrid purpose and cocked her gun. Putnam thrust a finger under the hammer that she might not discharge it.

But the prisoner's feet, while tied to the stake, were not so tightly secured as to prevent his drawing up his leg. His left knee came up and smashed heavily into the face of his tormentor.

With a scream of rage the warrior staggered back, blood pouring from his mouth and nose; and he would have knifed Willis then and there had not some of his companions seized him and dragged him away. In the bright firelight Putnam observed that his young friend's face was haggard; but the pose of the uplifted head was as confident and bold as ever.

"They ain't touched his nerve yet," whispered Putnam. "Do you hear that loon?"

The girl nodded, still watching the prisoner.

"Well, don't get nervous when I give a loon call. The Indians won't notice it as that loon's been crying out for some time."

He waited a moment, then threw back his head and gave the weird call of the loon. The girl kept her gaze fastened on Willis and saw his head give a little jerk. Then it slowly sank on his breast only to be lifted high the next moment.

"He heard. He understands. He signals to us that he knows we are near," she murmured.

"'Course he knows. That's why I run the risk. I wanted to put lots of heart into him so he won't bait them into killing him outright. He knows I'm here and that I'll shoot him before I'll let them kill him by inches. Now to get on the other side."

They moved rapidly, satisfied that no scouts were back of the ridge. The danger point would be when they crossed the trail leading into the gorge.

To escape any outposts they moved back a quarter of a mile into the deep woods before turning to cross the trail. No sentinels were discovered, and it was plain that the Potawatomi had no fears of being discovered by any enemy.

They were traveling parallel to the trail and toward the gorge when the sweep of scurrying feet through the dead leaves in a copse of maple and beech alarmed them. Putnam reached out a hand and swung the girl behind him and attempted to penetrate the darkness and discover what this extraordinary peril could be. For danger it must be, although it was not like the patter of moccasins, nor was there the usual savage outcry advertising the discovery of a victim. This alarm was more like a drove of animals rushing through the woods.

"It can't be wolves at this time of year," whispered Putnam.

"Dogs! The Blind Seneca's dogs!" exclaimed the girl under her breath. "Up a tree, quick! They know me and will not harm me."

"Dogs!" snapped Putnam. "I'd look pretty climbing a tree to get away from a parcel of dogs!"

"Don't talk," she begged. "Up a tree! These are worse than mad wolves. I vow candles. Our Lady help us!"

Putnam was far from being foolhardy, and the girl's great fear warned him that this was no common forest danger approaching. Reaching above his head, he located a big branch; and, dropping his gun, he tossed the girl upon it. Then, recovering his weapon, he swarmed up the trunk.

He had barely settled himself in the crotch of a mighty limb when the ground beneath him became alive with motion. He heard the sinister snaps leaping high to get at him, and he could picture the slavering jaws and cruel fangs.

"Don't shoot," warned the girl. "The Blind Seneca must be close at hand. But what of Ephraim Willis? What are they doing to the poor lad now? I must go to him."

He felt the bough give and heard her moccasins strike the ground in the midst of the jumble below. Without any hesitation he pulled his ax and leaped after her.

"They're muzzled. Don't hurt them," she cried out as he grasped a throat and felt a hot breath in his face and raised his ax.

Then he realized that, although several forms had leaped against him, the very pressure of the pack holding him erect, he had felt no teeth.

"Stand perfectly still," she warned. "They remember me. They pay no attention to me."

Next he heard her tearing a branch from a tree. She waded among the brutes, switching them smartly and talking softly in the Seneca tongue. The big brutes whined and persisted in leaping upon the ranger for a bit, then heeded her voice and whip and finally squatted in a circle about her.

"Now I think they will stay here till their

master comes. It is time for you and me, *m'sieu*, to be hurrying on to save Ephraim Willis," she panted.

"Do these dogs usually go muzzled?"

"No. The Iroquois keep clear of the Blind Seneca's camp. It would be bad for their medicine if they harmed his pets. And he, although he is crazy, knows enough to keep the pack away from the villages of the Long House.

"I do not understand why they ran away. But let us go!"

"How many are there?"

"There was a dozen in the pack. Wait. I will count.

She plied her switch till all the brutes were cowering at her feet, then swiftly passed her hands over their heads.

"I count ten," she said. "What of it?"

"I was thinking," he mumbled absent-mindedly.

A soft whistle disturbed his meditations, and every dog was erect and making over the back trail.

"It's Joseph Brant's signal," cried the girl; and she replied to it.

THE boy glided through the bush and stood between them, the dogs meekly grouped behind him.

"They got way from me," he panted. "I had the leaders on a rope. They broke loose; then all went. I have run for miles.

"The ranger who struck me, Joseph Brant, the red brother of Sir William Johnson, Joseph Brant of the Mohawks—is he dead?"

"God forbid! We go to rescue him," said Putnam.

"Then he shall owe part of his life to me," said the boy. "I will show him I can save as well as kill. I am sending the pack up the trail at the throats of the Potawatomi. All the sorcerers in their nation can not save them once I take off the muzzles. The Blind Seneca is making medicine for the white puppy, which is now with its mother. So I borrowed the black pack."

"That was what I was thinking," softly exulted Putnam.

"Wait!"

And the boy seized a panther shape and dragged it to Putnam and rubbed the muzzle against the ranger's leg, all the time talking sharply in Seneca.

This was repeated with the others, and Putnam checked off ten, just as the girl had counted them in the darkness.

"Now they understand you are a friend of mine," haughtily the boy informed them.

"Good. That will make it much pleasanter," said Putnam. "The Laughing One and I will go up the right-hand side of the gorge where the cover is good. The other side is choked by fallen timber. We will creep very close. Get the dogs to the mouth of the gorge but do not send them in until you hear the cry of a loon. Then send them flying."

The boy found the thongs trailing from the necks of the leaders, tied them round a sapling and began removing the muzzles. The pack showed no disposition to precede the leaders, and the Blind Seneca's discipline had been too severe to encourage useless baying. At young Brant's suggestion Putnam paused to help in removing the rawhide muzzles so that the dogs might thoroughly identify him as a friend.

"They have run far. I can manage them now," said the boy, walking between the leaders. "When you call, we come."

Putnam took the lead and soon sighted the fire up the gorge. He swung deeper into the wood, the girl keeping close behind him and gritting her teeth to keep from screaming. Well concealed by the heavy growth, they worked their way through the mouth. They heard low voices of sentinels.

Once through the opening, they stole down to the floor of the gorge and advanced more swiftly. When they halted they were within ten rods of Willis.

The savages were placing a circle of brush around the prisoner, taking care it should not be close enough to end the sport prematurely. And they mixed a certain amount of green boughs with the dry so that there should be the torture of smoke without the relief of asphyxiation.

"They are releasing his feet and arms," whispered the girl. "Call the dogs."

"Keep quiet," sternly ordered Putnam. "We don't want the dogs till the red hellions get so interested in their work that they won't see them coming."

He knew full well the meaning of the loosened thongs. It was to permit the prisoner to sway his body ahead and to one side to escape the scorching flames. His efforts to escape being roasted would afford exquisite amusement to the spectators and would be futile once the fire had run around the circle.

Willis too understood the motive, being a veteran in Shawnee warfare; and as a brave kneeled to lengthen the cord about his ankles he brought up a foot and stamped it on the warrior's head, driving it into the dirt. Shifting his weight, he held the man a prisoner for a few moments, kicking and squirming and nailed down by the neck. On extricating himself the enraged brave snatched out an ax and was for braining the captive at once, but laughing warriors pulled him back.

"Lord, but that boy's got the right spirit!" whispered Putnam.

The girl, watching Willis' defiance, pressed the gun to her bosom and mumbled:

"He is a very brave man. The good God sustain him!"

"He will. And we'll help," murmured Putnam.

The work of arranging the fuel proceeded rapidly, the savages now keeping a sharp eye on their victim, for as surely as one drew within reach of the tethered feet he as surely received a kick and a string of caustic abuse. Once the girl clapped her hands to her ears as Willis caught a man under the jaw with a short kick and in provincial vernacular loudly expressed his opinion of him.

"He doesn't know you're near," apologized Putnam. "I must correct him later. But the best of men get careless of speech when in great danger. I swore fearfully on the morning of the bloody scout, when we caught Dieskau."

"He is a very brave man," she murmured. "Oh! They bring coals from the fire to light the brush. I will shoot!"

"No, no. It will take a little time for the fire to run round the circle. They've hitched him up loose so he can draw away and escape hurt till the circle is all ablaze. They're taking their time.

"There comes a man from the mouth of the gorge. He looks back. He has a companion. I want them all here together when I give the signal. The dogs must fall on them like so many thunderbolts."

Two more men now came from the mouth of the gorge, making three sentinels that Putnam and the girl had passed. The fire now burned briskly in front of the prisoner, sending out red tongues on each side.

The sweat stood on Willis' face and he often turned his gaze toward the ridge where Putnam had stood when sounding his call. As the smoke swept into his face he bowed his head. The wind turned it aside and his head came erect.

As the heat began to bite into his flesh he took advantage of the slack, and swung out to one side and backward. As yet he had suffered no serious hurt or pain. But he knew that a fiery furnace was infinitely more merciful than this slow baking process. Once the heat became equal at all points he would pray for death.

The cry of a loon rang out. Willis threw up his head. The flames had gained ground on his right, so now he could only sway to the left and backward. Lifting his voice as if shouting his death-song, he loudly called:

"Israel Putnam, don't let them roast me. You can't save me. Don't try. When the fire gets on my left shoot me and run like —— if you love Connecticut."

The girl was muttering over and over. "He suffers! He suffers! Oh, poor lad! Poor lad!"

Once more Putnam gave the signal, this time so loudly that one or two of the savages jerked up their heads as if suspicious. The sport before them, however, was too good to neglect. They were drunk with the lust to torment. And they formed a circle and danced grotesquely around the straining form. They gibed and jeered, and one leaped over the fiery barrier to tear off the scalp and dash it into the prisoner's face; but angry hands pulled him back for a spoil-sport.

Putnam's face was gray with the strain. Where was young Brant with the dogs? To shoot one of the savages would mean immediate death to the prisoner.

"I'm going to nail the man that seems to be the leader; then rush in and club my gun," he muttered. "If I can't get to the boy I'll go down fighting; and you must shoot him."

"Something moves down there," she hysterically whispered, shaking his arm and pointing toward the mouth of the gorge.

Through the flames and the smoke Putnam glimpsed motion, a dark patch that approached with undulating movement. Then he made out the slight figure of the boy racing behind the pack.

Around the stake and the struggling figure of the captive shrieked and danced the Potawatomi, nearly a score of them, their stark figures doubling over until their filthy hair dragged on the ground. As they pranced stiff-legged they cut down imaginary foes, lunged and scalped the air with lusting knives and howled in an ecstasy of bestial passion. Onward swept the fell black pack of the Blind Seneca, unmuzzled and racing with slavering jaws straight as an arrow toward the game which would not be denied them.

ONE of the dancers lifted his head from between his knees and flung it far back, yowling like a woods-cat, and through his half-closed lids beheld the onrushing beast with many heads. He came to a staggering halt and the man behind bumped into him and hurled him from the line. He tried to cry out, but the words froze on his snarling lips; and the next moment he was bowled over with inexorable fangs buried in his throat.

Into the fire and through it again leaped the huge beasts, their short-haired coats of black making each a four-legged devil, their blazing eyes and dripping jaws unlike anything the Potawatomi ever had encountered in the wide forests. On the edge of the mad mélange of screaming warriors and mouthing brutes danced the imp of a boy, shrieking commands and encouragement, and shooting with bow and arrow whenever a warrior rolled clear of the fray. Ten dogs and twenty warriors. Ten devils and a score of terrified red men. Putnam shouted to the girl to remain in hiding and dashed into the fight, gun in one hand and ax in the other.

The black pack and the warriors had wallowed back and forth through the burning brush, scattering it in smoking heaps. Putnam leaped a confused mass of brutes, two and four-legged,

and landed by the side of Willis. The latter was gazing wildly on the scene.

With blows of his ax Putnam freed him and then pushed him toward the girl's hiding-place. A warrior unhampered by a dog ran toward them. Putnam saved his head by driving the butt of his gun into the evil face.

A dog leaped up on Putnam and caught him by the shoulder. The ranger hoarsely commanded him to "down." A glimmer of sense reminded the maddened creature that this was a friend, and he swerved back to where the hunting was legitimate. Pushing and half-carrying Willis, the ranger got him under cover and into the caressing hands of the weeping girl.

"Get him out of here. Down the trail. We'll pick you up," panted Putnam.

And he was back to the fight.

Now the Indians were beginning to battle more valiantly. The edge of the surprize was worn off. All were armed with axes and knives; and as Putnam ran in he saw several of the dogs stretched out dead, one of the leaders lying with his teeth through the throat of the brave who had stabbed him through the heart. Of the surviving dogs several were mortally wounded but were still able to do mischief.

Had each brute selected a warrior and after finishing him made for another, the pack would have soon whipped the Indians. But some continued to worry dead bodies; two would unite in mauling a warrior already dying.

The Potawatomi found themselves free to glance about and inventory the situation. Young Brant gave ground, while from his lips repeatedly pealed the terrible war-cry of his people. As a dog made a kill he would frenziedly shout:

"Here do you receive it! *Kul*"

Putnam shot a Potawatomi through the head as he was about to hurl his ax at the lad, and the latter yelled back to him—

"He who dwells in the sky shall be pleased with you, white man."

Putnam swung his gun by the barrel and battered a way to the youth, caught him by the arm and commanded:

"Come away. Most of the dogs are dead."

"See! See! Another kill!" shrieked the boy, tossing up his bow and twanging the empty string. "*Kul*"

It was the second of the leaders. Torn and stabbed until barely able to stand, he had reared up by a supreme effort and caught a bronzed throat and with a final effort closed the vise and extinguished the savage life.

Putnam seized the boy by leg and shoulder, threw him on his back and raced for cover.

"I can not leave them. Let me go," screamed the boy.

Then to the surviving dogs:

"Let him have it! Let him have it! *Kul Kul* Brave kill!"

"You young devil!" panted Putnam, swinging Brant to the ground and tearing the boy's hand from his hair. "Trying to scalp me? Can't you remember you are a Mohawk? Be you a wild, Western Indian that hoots and howls and loses his head?

"The dogs are done for. There'll be eight or ten warriors left. We must get the girl and the man out of this."

"I am a Mohawk. Take your hand from me," gasped the boy.

"You have acted like a mighty war chief. Your name will be sung in many Mohawk castles," warmly declared Putnam. "But it must not be said you let the man be recaptured after setting him free. The girl is trying to get him out of the gorge. She will need help. Where is your gun?"

"Loaded, and at the mouth of this place. I left it to handle the dogs. We will go."

They reached the edge of the woods, where Willis had joined the girl, and glanced back. The fight was still in progress around the stake, seven or eight Indians striking knives and axes at the few surviving dogs.

"A round dozen Indians dead or badly wounded," rejoiced Putnam. "T'others ain't got much fight left in them. Now to find the girl and Willis."

Once away from the camp-fire, the night closed them in a closet; but the cry of the loon needed no torch, and the first signal was promptly answered from down the gorge. From the fluttering, nervous timbre Putnam knew the girl had answered instead of Willis.

They ran as fast as the woods and the darkness would permit, Putnam occasionally giving the signal so the fugitives would not mistake them for the enemy. After they had passed out of the gorge the girl called to them softly, and they found her seated with Willis' head in her lap.

"Is he dying?" she faintly asked.

"He don't dare die after all the trouble we've took and after all the dogs we've used up," growled Putnam. "Joseph Brant, take my hat and bring water. You'll find some somewhere."

As the boy departed there came from the gorge the death-cry of the Potawatomi, announcing the end of the fearful conflict.

"Good dogs!" mumbled Putnam. "They had a glorious finish. Now I wonder if the redskins got enough, or will try to follow us."

"Water!" faintly whispered Willis.

The bushes rustled, and young Brant handed Putnam the hat brimming over with water. Putnam allowed the sufferer to drink half, and poured the rest over the scorched head and face. Handing the hat back to the boy, he directed:

"Fill it again and overtake us on the trail. Only a Mohawk chief could find water on a night like this.

"Come, Ephraim Willis. No more time for fooling. You've got to travel."

CHAPTER XIII

THE VOTE OF THE AXES

FOR three days the Indian boy, the two rangers and the woman spy made their way south. The pace was slow. Willis suffered more from exhaustion and nerve-strain than Putnam had anticipated. He seemed indifferent to the danger of pursuit by the Potawatomi and desired only to rest on the clean forest floor with his head pillowed on the girl's knees.

Young Brant scouted for small game, something he could knock over with ax or arrow. Willis seldom spoke and the girl was lost to all but her lover's eloquent eyes. Two young fools, Putnam called them. After twenty-four hours had failed to show that the Potawatomi were on their trail Putnam ceased to fear pursuit. To make sure he scouted far up the back trail seeking signs and found none.

So soon as he decided that there was no danger he grew impatient to return to active duty on the lake. Willis, however, developed a curious physical apathy, and it required the efforts of young Brant and Putnam to keep him moving.

But on the third day a marked improvement was noticeable in the rescued ranger. His senses became objective, and he declared that he could walk without help.

Although this proved to be true the girl insisted that he must go with her to the nearest Mohawk village and rest; and it resulted in Putnam's bidding them good-by in the depths of the forest. Leaving the boy and the girl to conduct Willis to some Mohawk Castle, the ranger tucked his gun under his arm and gladly struck off for the head of Lake George.

He was impatient to learn how Major Rogers had fared with the Canadian regulars at Sabbath Day Point. He was anxious to get back into harness and have done with side exploits.

The status of the girl impressed him as being more favorable. He was convinced that she would not leave her lover to go forest-running and collecting news for the French. So long as Willis remained incapacitated she would remain anchored at his side.

On the morning of the fourth day Putnam reached the Fort Edward military road, striking into it where Sir William Johnson had camped the year before. It was his intention to follow it to Fort William Henry near by, but one of Rogers' men overtook him and electrified him by announcing:

"Major Rogers sends me to the fort for reenforcements. Marin and his men are back there somewhere near old Fort Anne. Our scouts found their trail yesterday."

"What is the major's force?"

"Some eighty rangers, some light infantry and some provincials."

This news was sufficient to send Putnam speeding across-country toward the abandoned post. Marin was Montcalm's most famous partizan leader, a foe worthy of any opponent's best efforts. Wherever Marin led his Canadians and red allies, there was the crux of danger.

Less than two hours of travel brought Putnam to the west branch of Wood Creek a short distance above its junction with the east branch. As he gained the bank two shots rang out directly south of him, or in the direction of Fort Anne a mile away. He waited several minutes and two more shots split the air.

"That can't be a fight," he muttered, turning and following the bank up-stream. "But if it isn't a fight, what is it? And Marin supposed to be close at hand."

He had not traveled more than an eighth of a mile before he came to an opening and was astonished to behold some threescore rangers lounging on the ground and watching Major Rogers and another shooting at a birch-bark target. The second man Putnam recognized as Lieutenant Irwin.

"Captain Putnam! Glad to see you!" cried Rogers. "How about the young man?"

"Got him clear all right. Queer story, but it can keep. You're not afraid your shots will bring Marin down on you?"

"No danger. Wish they would," lightly replied Rogers. "Leftenant Irwin and I have a little wager up. And, —— me, I'm afraid he's going to best me."

"But, major," remonstrated Putnam, "if Marin should come and find this handful of men——"

"And the men you don't see," chuckled Rogers, pointing toward the woods. "I've got infantry and provincials. We whipped that detachment at Sabbath Day Point. Glorious fight. You ought 'a' been there. Wait a minute."

He turned back to the firing-line and sent a bullet within a hair's-breath of dead center. Lieutenant Irwin fired and missed by an eighth of an inch. As Rogers reloaded he said:

"Marin's down here for mischief. Hit his trail yesterday. Think he's planning a raid on Fort Edward. He's got between four and five hundred Canadians and Indians. I'm waiting for my scouts to come in.

"You will lead the provincials, as they are nearly all Connecticut men. You'll find them in the bush there, also Captain Dalzell, who's to hold the middle of the line, the regulars. I shall bring up the rear with the rangers."

"I met your scout going for reenforcements. Will you wait for them?"

"Lord, no! Just like to know they're coming. All right, leftenant; see if you can match this."

This time he drilled the black spot through the center.

Putnam crossed the opening and entered the woods, his heart uneasy. If Marin and his force were within hearing of the shooting he would either attack or steal away. In either case there would be no chance of taking him by surprize. This bit of carelessness was not in keeping with Rogers' usual custom.

Putnam came to the regulars sprawled out on the forest floor and staring through the gloomy depths with uneasy eyes. A little apart from the men was Captain Dalzell, calm and unconcerned, fated to be killed by Pontiac's warriors at Detroit.

Exchanging greetings with Dalzell, Putnam passed on to the provincials, who were quite at home in the wild environment. The men were greatly pleased to have a Connecticut man as commander, and even more pleased that the man should be of Putnam's distinction.

"Let 'em come!" cried one. "We've got Wolf Putnam! We'll give 'em their guts full of fighting."

Putnam called for silence and began to instruct them as to their position in the line and the work expected of them. He had spoken for only a minute when he heard a commotion in the opening and the sharp voice of Rogers hurling commands.

"—— full of fiddlers, boys!" roared Putnam. "They've bumped us! Up lads, and follow me."

Before the men could more than get on their feet Lieutenant Irwin came running through the words and calling out:

"Captain Putnam, Major Rogers says for you to start your men up the creek for Fort Anne. Our scouts report Marin is below the fort, probably on his way to attack the Fort Edward supply wagons. Either that or he's trying to get across to East Creek to escape by way of South Bay."

"Thank —— it wasn't a surprize attack," muttered Putnam. "My respects to Major Rogers. The provincials start at once."

The provincials fell in and the regulars under Dalzell took their position behind them. Putnam led the way in person, keeping close to the creek. He sent a man back to Rogers, asking if he should depend on provincial scouts to cover the advance, or if some of the rangers should be detailed for this most important work.

While waiting for a reply he ordered some of his most likely men to precede the long-drawn-out line. Before the messenger had returned or any of his own scouts had reported the trail debouched from the forest and into the bush-covered area surrounding the old fort.

Still in advance of his men, Putnam struck into the narrow Indian trail. He had covered nearly three-fourths of the distance across the opening and was wondering what signs his men had picked up in the woods beyond when a firelock blazed on his right, or west of the trail. For a second he supposed it was one of his own men; then he glimpsed a savage face.

"On your hands and knees!" he thundered to his men. "We're ambushed!"

THERE came a volley of bullets and a cloud of arrows. The savage who had fired his piece prematurely came leaping through the bushes to retrieve his error by some startling coup, and he fell upon Putnam. The ranger flung him off, blocked a swing of the Indian's ax and, pulling his knife, slashed it across the hideous countenance. With a howl of pain the warrior crashed into the bushes.

The line of fire told Putnam that Marin had arranged his ambush in a half-circle, the deepest point being where it cut the trail. If the flanks closed in the provincials would be in great danger of being pinched off from the rest of the forces.

For a few moments the provincials seemed to be dazed by the suddenness of the attack, but quickly recovered their nerve and sent up a cheer. Putnam roared commands for them to keep concealed below the bushes and to deploy on both sides of the trail.

The regulars were inclined to remain huddled together, and Putnam could hear Dalzell striving to make them spread out to prevent a flank attack. At the peril of his life Putnam stood erect and looked back for some sign of Rogers and his rangers. These at that moment were a mile away.

The hidden foe increased their fire and the provincials began to give ground, falling back through the bushes yet stanchly attempting to form a line, each man fighting on his own initiative. Putnam rallied them with his thunderous battle-cry, leading the advance with a contempt for danger that inspired them all.

The regulars also now settled down to business and proved their metal by pressing forward to get at death-grips with the concealed enemy.

A Canadian, naked and painted like an Indian, leaped up from cover as Putnam crashed forward and hurled his ax. Putnam dropped and threw his ax, splitting the fellow's head.

Now the battle was general all along the curving front, the provincials doggedly fighting from clump to clump, the regulars coming to their support in good form under Dalzell's encouragment. Rogers as yet had not reached the clearing.

Marin gave the order for his men to charge, hoping to overwhelm both provincials and regulars before the rangers could arrive. Putnam bellowed for his men to stand firm.

A giant of a Caughnawaga, wearing the totem of an eagle on his massive chest, rose from the ground and plunged for Putnam. The

latter threw forward his gun, cocked it and pulled the trigger; but the piece missed fire, and the next instant the savage had wrenched it from his hands and felled him with a blow from a club.

Although but partly stunned he was unable to offer any great resistance for several moments, and when he would have renewed the conflict it was to find a rawhide thong looped about his wrists, which had been twisted behind his back. The Caughnawaga began retreating toward the edge of the forest, keeping the throng taut and his captive's wrists drawn well forward. Struggle as he would, the ranger was unable to overcome the savage's great advantage.

Before he realized his captor's intentions the latter had dodged around a small spruce and had a line of the tough cord entangling the prisoner's legs. With great dexterity the savage further secured the kicking feet. To tie Putnam against the tree was now easily accomplished. Leaving him there to await the outcome of the battle, the Indian darted back into the bush to win more glory.

Putnam soon perceived that the provincials were slowly giving ground, although there was no suggestion of a panic. Indians and Canadians were streaming by him on both sides. The prisoner, regardless of his danger, began shouting for his men to stand firm, his stentorian voice reaching across the clearing.

A French bas-officier yelled for him to keep still, then leveled a fusee at his breast; but the piece missed fire. With a furious oath the man reversed the gun and dashed the butt against Putnam's jaw.

The provincials continued falling back, but deploying to right and left and preventing Marin's flanks from closing in. And if the surprize attack had cost the head of the column dear, so also had the enemy paid a heavy toll.

Putnam, with jaw numb and all but fractured was no longer able to sound his battle-call.

A young warrior, not overanxious to reach the forefront of the fighting, halted on beholding him and let drive with his ax. The prisoner did not move his head and the blade barely grazed his scalp.

With a grunt of admiration at the captive's bold bearing the brave recovered his ax and threw it a second time. Once more the iron sunk into the tree within a fraction of an inch of the prisoner's head. Several times did the brave prove his skill and the white man's iron nerve before bounding away.

From his position against the tree Putnam could see but little of the actual fighting, but his ears informed him quite accurately. When he heard the firing greatly increased at the opposite end of the clearing he knew Rogers and his men had come up at last.

Not only did the firing increase, but it drew nearer; and Putnam's heart leaped with joy. Now painted Canadians and painted red men began repassing him as the reenforced provincials grimly set about routing the enemy.

There followed a new phase of danger for the prisoner, for this retreat of the enemy placed him between two fires. Bullets discharged by friends struck the tree and even penetrated his clothing. Arrows were constantly going *plop* into the bark on both sides of his head. Some of these, he believed, were purposely sent to prevent his rescue.

He was exposed to this cross-fire for some time, but by some miracle escaped being wounded. Just as his hopes were high that another five minutes would see him released Marin ordered a charge, and the mixed band of skrieking partizans again swept forward. The provincials recoiled a bit, then stiffened and began to advance, for the deadly gun-fire of Rogers' eighty rangers was now registering heavily.

Back again surged the enemy, dismayed by the knowledge that they were whipped; and this time the big Caughnawaga was in the van of those retreating and remembered his prisoner long enough to cut the thong binding the ankles, and to sever the rawhide holding him to the tree. With upraised ax the Indian hurried his captive to the rear.

As Putnam glimpsed the dead and the many wounded he grunted through his swollen jaws—

"—— my blood, as Eph Willis says, but we've licked them!"

He was forced deep into the forest until well back of the French line, and on being allowed to halt was immediately divested of all his clothing, including his foot-gear, with the exception of his breeches. By this time the Indians were on the edge of a panic and eager to continue retreating. To add to their fears some sixty of Marin's Canadians now burst through the undergrowth in a mad rabble and deserted the fighting.

The Caughnawaga tightened the cord around Putnam's wrists until the pain was unendurable, and added a long line as a leading string. Next he gathered up the packs of the dead and wounded and heaped them upon the captive's broad shoulders until Putnam could hardly stand. Away streamed the Indians with the Caughnawaga making after them and relentlessly pulling his prisoner along by means of the string. Glimpsing a white coat hurrying by Putnam managed to gasp:

"*Attendez!* In God's mercy make them untie my hands and take off some of this load."

"Go to the devil!" was the rejoinder in English.

"Then kill me as an act of kindness."

The officer swung back, walking with a limp, and stooped to stare into Putnam's sweat-smeared face. Speaking to the Indian in the

Caughnawaga Mohawk dialect, he urged him to release the man's wrists and to lighten his load, as otherwise he would kill him.

The chief pondered this a moment and decided that the advice was good. He severed the thongs confining the ranger's wrists. Next he threw off some of the packs, and with a deep groan of relief Putnam straightened his aching back and began following his captor.

"Wait!" snarled the officer.

Then to the Caughnawaga:

"Why take prisoners for ransom or the torture if you kill their feet? Is this man a moose or a wolf that he can walk through this wilderness in the naked hide?"

Again the Caughnawaga heeded and fished a pair of moccasins from one of the discarded packs and permitted Putnam to stop and put them on.

Putnam twisted his head to thank the officer but through a blur of sweat only glimpsed the tails of the white coat disappearing through the bushes.

The flight was now almost a rout, the defection of the Canadians being generally known and the number being greatly exaggerated. The Indians had no heart for a give-and-take battle; and, hearing that all of their white allies had fled, they refused to take orders from Marin.

They were now arrived at the northern limits of a twelve-mile stretch of morass and were eager to pass this as the west branch of Wood Creek was on their immediate left and formed a narrow, dangerous exit from the scene of the fight.

They crowded through pell-mell, their confidence not returning until they were clear of the swampy region.

Once they struck into the road that cut across the East Branch the retreat became orderly, the warriors making good time. This was a good road, and extended parallel to Wood Creek to a point on Lake Champlain directly across from Ticonderoga. It was a much better route than Dieskau's Path along the west shore of Wood Creek and less liable to surprize attacks from the English.

Putnam managed to keep up with the red men despite his heavy burdens, but became separated from his captor quite early in the day.

At nightfall and after fires had been built in the black arches of the forests the Indians took time to consider him.

He had hoped to escape during the confusion of the retreat and under cover of darkness. He had expected the Indians to travel all night, but when he saw the fires springing up and the packs being piled in a heap his hopes diminished.

Some one removed the load from his back and he fell on the ground in a state of total collapse.

HE WAS indifferent to the murder-lusting eyes focused upon him. It interested him not at all when saplings were cut and laid across his inert body so that his guards could recline on the ends and be aroused by his slightest effort to escape.

For two hours he lay in a semi-stupor, and he was brought back to full consciousness only by his terrible thirst. On opening his eyes he saw that many more Indians had straggled in; and none entered the camp who did not pause and glare with gloating eyes down on the scratched and bruised face of the captive.

One of these bore a hideous slash across his face, extending from cheek to cheek and nearly severing his nose. Putnam tried to induce this savage to bring him some water, and a moccasin spurned his swollen jaw as an answer.

"The fellow I cut in the fight," he told himself as he stared steadily into the malignant eyes.

The savage hissed threats and passed on to the fire. Putnam rolled his eyes about in search of the friendly Frenchman or the Caughnawaga who had captured him. Neither was in the camp. So far as he could observe he was surrounded by French Mohawks and Oneidas and a few Abnaki.

Scouts arrived and reported that there was no sign of a pursuit. Immediately more fuel was heaped on the fires and the warriors grouped themselves in a half-circle around the prisoner. The man whose face Putnam had slashed at the beginning of the fight now rose and demanded—

"Who owns this white man?"

No one spoke for a minute. Then an Oneida rose and replied:

"Once the Red Eagle was with him. That was at the beginning of the march. He is not here to claim him. He must be dead.

"It is not good that a white man should be among us without an owner," cried the wounded warrior, his small eyes blazing wickedly.

"Ho!" chorused the assemblage in approval. "Black Turtle has spoken."

"Many of our red brothers have fallen, and their bones can never be covered," continued Black Turtle. "Little Onontio [the governor of Canada] will give us brandy and cloth; but will these gifts feed the ghosts of our dead? Great Onontio [the King of France] will send us many gifts; but a friend can not cover the bones of our dead and wipe up the blood of our slain.

"The floor of the lodge must be made clean with new bark hiding the red spots. This can be done only by our enemies. What will they give us? They send no wampum. They strike an ax in our face.

"But now they give us one of their warriors, a very brave man. This man will die very brave. The ghosts of our warriors will be glad when the ghost of this brave white man walks

among them and says our fires sent him to them. Then they will know we have covered their bones with his bones; and the wicked birds will not talk to us at night. I have spoken."

"Ho! Ho! He looks like a brave man. He will not make us hang our heads in shame by dying like a weak man," shouted a warrior.

A guttural chorus of "Ho! Ho!" endorsed this sentiment.

The spokesman turned his evil gaze on Putnam and glared at him mockingly and then called out—

"Let the axes say if we must cover the bones of our dead this night."

With a cunning twist of the hand each brave sent his French tomahawk spinning eight or ten feet above his head, the firelight glinting on the revolving blade and causing each to suggest a wheel of fire. The axes rose in true perpendicular and fell back into their owner's hands without a body moving, without a hand being lifted to catch them. It was as if a curtain of flickering fire rose above the half-circle to drop abruptly to the ground.

Black Turtle witnessed this approval of his plea with greedy eyes. He pulled out his own ax and, staring straight ahead, sent it spinning high above his head. Without stirring from his tracks or seeming to note the return of the weapon he simply opened his hand and caught it by the handle.

"So do we all say," he cried.

Another pause for the sake of decorum, and then came the vital query—

"Shall we roast this white man to cover our dead?"

Again the axes rose as one, an exhibition of the juggler's art, and fell into the waiting hands. Once more the speaker sent his own ax to the boughs over his head and caught it by the handle without appearing to be conscious of the act.

"So do we all say!" he triumphantly cried.

In spite of his thirst and the excruciating pain in his swollen jaws Putnam had followed the speeches and the vote of the axes with close attention. His death sentence had been pronounced. His strength was sapped, but his indomitable will could not be weakened.

He heard the blows of tomahawks eagerly trimming the boughs from some small conifer.

He caught glimpses of warriors carrying dry brush. Then the saplings were removed from his aching body and he was jerked to his feet and stripped naked.

The man performing the last office slapped his hand against the swollen jaw. With a low, bull-like rumble Putnam struck him in the neck with his clinched fist, knocking him senseless.

Another struck the swollen visage with the flat of his tomahawk, sending the prisoner reeling to his knees. As he staggered to his feet his hands clutched one of the saplings, and before his grinning tormentor could guess the captive's purpose the butt end of the sapling struck him in the mouth, dislodging several teeth and ripping open his cheek. With a scream the warrior recovered his balance and sprang to finish the captive.

He was promptly seized by the master of ceremonies, who shouted:

"Let us remember we are of the Iroquois and before that of the Hurons. A brave man ready to die should not be beaten like a dog.

"My brother is angry because the white man cut his face. So did this white man cut my face. It does not hurt me."

And to show his unconcern for the horrible and disfiguring wound he ran the point of his knife along the gash, causing it to bleed. This example of fortitude quieted the infuriated brave, who fell back and endeavored to ignore his hurts. Black Turtle continued—

"Let some one give him water, so he may take more time in dying."

A kettle of water was at once produced and Black Turtle carefully held it while Putnam drank. The ranger did not need to meet the malignant gaze over the rim of the kettle to understand the motive behind this act of seeming kindness. Yet never did a drink taste so good, and in finishing he contrived to slop much of the water over his neck and shoulders. Then, lifting his head, he managed to proclaim—

"If I ain't swallowed enough water to put out all the fires you hellions can start I'll die very respectably, and be —— to you, you mangy curs."

All caught his meaning, and more than one sardonic face broke into a slight smile of admiration for his bearing. He was gently conducted inside the circle of brush and the green rawhide thongs were fastened to his ankles and then to the stake with considerable slack allowed.

The stub of a limb had been left above his head for a purpose. Over this a line was passed and then down under his arms and across his chest; this to hold him upright should the torture cause him to collapse. His hands were fastened behind the stake, and again a liberal allowance of slack was made. Putnam calmly tested the cords and the rawhide under his arms and told himself:

"They allow more room than the Potawatomi let Willis have. I could almost slide behind this post."

Then after his gaze had roved round the circle of brush he critically added—

"Just far enough away to get an even bake."

BLACK TURTLE now brought a torch from the fire and suddenly dashed it toward Putnam's face. The ranger did not flinch although the heat shriveled up his eyebrows. The spectators shouted approval,

and the Turtle ignited the brush. Putnam called out in English, speaking slowly that it might be interpreted by those understanding:

"I killed and scalped a Potawatomi sorcerer and two of his men near Fort Edward. A few sleeps ago I took a white man away from the Potawatomi as they were trying to burn him in their camp near the Hatirontaks. Eight out of twenty were alive when I took my friend away.

"I have killed French Mohawks around Lake George. I have sent many Canadian Indians ahead of me. I have never met any who could fight me man to man. White men train their women and children to whip French Indians away with sticks if ever they get lost and come near our settlements."

"Ho! Ho!" thundered the warriors, spinning their axes. "We know he is a very brave man. His *orenda* is very strong. Teharonhiawagon, the Master of Life, hears the white man's challenge song and finds it good."

A drop of moisture fell on Putnam's neck, and almost immediately he announced—

"My *orenda* tells me your fire is poor and will not burn."

The brush was crackling merrily and throwing off much heat. The warriors smiled grimly and made ready to dance about their victim. The flames spread and the ranger began to feel the heat searing his naked body. He was on the point of sagging back the full length of the slack and thus affording his tormentors their first great thrill of joy when the rain began. It was but a shower, yet sufficient to reduce the fire to smoking embers.

"My *orenda* tells me I shall not burn," cried Putnam through his clenched teeth. "The French Indians forgot how to make a fire when they left the Long House."

With angry exclamations the Indians raked aside the dampened fuel and hastened deep into the forest for dry brush. Scowling glances were directed at the complacent prisoner by those who remained near the stake.

His reputation as a bushfighter, his fame for being devoid of fear, was well known throughout the red confederacy supporting the cause of the Great Onontio. Just what his magic would enable him to accomplish remained to be seen; but the opportune arrival of the shower bespoke of a very powerful *orenda*.

Although converted into "praying" Mohawks by the zealous priests, they had not washed paganism from their blood. This was the man who by supernatural aid had overcome the mighty *manito* of the Potawatomi sorcerer. The more recent battle with the Potawatomi they had not heard about, but never for a moment did they doubt the prisoner's version of it.

Now the braves returned with dry brush. Before arranging it one of their number peered up through the narrow opening above the torture post and beheld the stars. Fire was brought from the sheltered camp blaze, and again the red tongues began licking a path around the prisoner. The heat scorched, and the prisoner drew his body aside.

"Where is the white man's *orenda* now?" mocked Black Turtle.

The fire was now half-way around the circle and the savages began their dance. The first few steps were taken slowly, much like the leisurely movement of a mechanism not sufficiently wound up. The heel and ball of each foot was brought down forcefully. As the fire spread and as the victim was forced to writhe and twist more rapidly the dancers grew more furious in their deportment, and madness seized upon them.

So hideous and grotesque were their actions and motions, so ridiculous in his eyes were their insane gesticulations, that Putnam lifted his head and began laughing. At first they believed that his sufferings had deprived him of his senses, and some one called out that he should be removed from the stake until he could regain his reason and realize he was being tortured.

Several shook off the frenzy of the dance and studied him sharply. They decided he was laughing because he was genuinely amused. The warriors were amazed and stared at him in dumb astonishment.

By degrees their intelligence appreciated the great spirit of the man, only they misconstrued his mirth. They credited him with a supernormal disdain for pain, whereas he took no pride in his ability to laugh. His quality of courage was inherent. He could no more assume responsibility for it than he could for the color of his eyes. To intimate friends he frankly vowed he never experienced the sensation of bodily fear. Had the Caughnawaga known this they would have explained it as phase of madness, and while viewing him with awe they would have witheld some of the admiration they expressed by grunts and their deep: "Ho! Ho!"

"Ho! A mighty chief! A Roianer Chief!" shouted the Black Turtle.

"He dies strong!" cried others.

But now the flames were completing the circle, and the prisoner's freedom of movement no longer afforded him a surcease from torment. He pressed hard against the stake and fought to betray no weakness as he felt his skin shriveling.

Just as he was surrendering his last hope Marin, the partizan, rushed on the scene and with loud maledictions kicked the brush aside. Before the stupefied Indians could resent his interference he had caught up a kettle of water and dashed it over Putnam's tortured body. And never did a baked skin absorb moisture so gratefully. Marin was deeply versed in reading

the Indian mind and well knew that the advantage was his only so long as he maintained the initiative. Facing the scowling warriors, he wrathfully cried:

"You take it on yourselves to kill the prisoner of the Red Eagle. You rob a war chief of his prisoner. Where are the prisoners you Caughnawaga braves took? Are you so poor in prisoners you must roast a man captured by another? You will explain to Red Eagle, who will soon be here."

Nonplused by this plain speaking and fully aware of their gross breach of deportment in putting another man's captive to death, the warriors took the defensive; and Black Turtle replied:

"We thought this man was no man's man. If he belongs to the Red Eagle, why did the Eagle leave him on the open for us to keep from escaping?"

"Because the Eagle was busy on the Great Onontio's business," hotly replied Marin. "Because he believed that when his brothers found a white man bound and loaded with packs in their midst they would know some brave warrior had captured him.

"Did the Caughnawagas believe that this great white warrior tied and stripped himself and loaded himself with Indian packs? You can tell your words to the Eagle when he comes and finds his prisoner half-roasted."

"We believed that the warrior who took the white man prisoner had been killed, leaving him a prisoner of the nation. We can talk our words to Red Eagle and hold our faces high. We have done no wrong to the Eagle," sullenly answered Black Turtle.

Satisfied in having saved Putnam from the stake, Marin led the ranger to one side and called for bear's oil. This was promptly provided, and, aided by hands that were as deft and gentle as they had been remorseless, Putnam's body was well oiled and some of his clothing returned to him.

"Your burns are not bad," encouraged Marin as Putnam for the third time buried his face in a kettle of water.

"In another five minutes I'd been well done," mumbled Putnam through his swollen jaws. "Took all the moisture out of my hide and bones. I can't get enough water. What next?"

"I hope to get you to Montcalm alive."

"The Red Eagle?"

"He is back along the trail. If you're able to walk we'll try to go on before he comes."

"Then he might not mind seeing me tortured?"

"Not if he could have the leading part."

"I'm much obliged to you, M'sieu Marin, no matter how it turns out. Could I have something to eat?"

"By the way you talk I'm afraid you can't use your jaws."

The partizan had correctly diagnosed Putnam's condition. While he could talk it was impossible for him to masticate food, the slightest effort causing him unbearable agony.

"If those red devils really wanted to hurt me they oughter made me eat," he groaned.

Marin was both resourceful and determined to play the capable host. From his pack he took some ration biscuits and soaked them to a pulp in water. These Putnam managed to swallow. The partizan next ran to a camp-kettle and procured a piece of bear-meat. He cut this into small pieces, and Putnam sucked the juice through his teeth.

AS PUTNAM finished the last piece of meat Red Eagle stalked into camp. He halted in the middle of the wide circle of silent warriors and gazed about. The charred brush, the empty stake and the sight of Marin caring for Putnam told him the whole story. Throwing back his head, he haughtily demanded—

"Who thought he had a right to burn the prisoner of the Eagle?"

There was dead silence for a minute; then a middle-aged warrior with white bars painted across his face stood up and composedly informed the other:

"The Caughnawaga Mohawks find a white man of the Yengees on the trail to this place. No one was with him to claim. There was no totem mark on him to show who owned him.

"Those of our people who serve the Little Onontio and the Great Onontio knew of only one death for such. Had he been a weak man we would have hit him in the face with an ax and left him for the wolves. Being a very brave man, one who would honor us by his death, we decided to burn him."

The Eagle lowered angrily at the circle of immobile faces and said:

"He is the prisoner of the Eagle. It is for the Eagle to say when and where he shall die.

"Sometimes the Eagle strikes down game and leaves it for those whose feet are stuck in the ground. But it is for the Eagle to give, not to be robbed. It would be very bad if my brothers in dancing around a prisoner kicked an ax from the earth."

This veiled threat was more distasteful to Marin than would be the death of one of Roger's rangers, and he quickly advanced to smooth out the trouble. What with the desertion of his Canadians and his daily difficulty in handling the Indians as a unit he was constantly called upon to exercise a rare diplomacy.

At the risk of offending his hearers by violating Indian etiquette he began speaking. He reminded his audience that they were all children of the Great Onontio, and that the enemy laughed whenever they quarreled among themselves. He spoke soothingly, and

insisted that while the Red Eagle's prey was not to be made free with by others yet the mistake had been a natural one; that the prisoner was very brave and had carried himself well.

The prisoner's bearing, he argued, had reflected the utmost credit on his captor; for only a most mighty war chief could capture such a dauntless fighter alive. If the Caughnawagas had erred in not waiting longer before putting the man to the torture they had at least satisfied themselves that the Red Eagle was watched over by an all-powerful *orenda* when he captured a man who could laugh as the flames ate into his flesh.

"No ax has been kicked loose from the forest floor," he declared in conclusion. "If any one here thought he saw the blade of an ax close to the top of the ground he was mistaken. What he saw was long gift knives from Montcalm. If his eyesight is very keen he can see even into Fort Ticonderoga and behold many kegs of brandy and an ox waiting to be roasted."

This speech closed the breach between the Eagle's offended dignity and the warriors' chagrin at being taken to task after losing a night's entertainment. The Eagle even condescended to say—

"When we get under the walls of the fort and have a keg of brandy brought out the Eagle will show you how a brave man should be sent to his death."

"Ho! Ho!" cheered the warriors, much pleased with the promise. "Let us go to the place where the white man shall receive it."

"Out of the frying-pan into the fire," mused Putnam.

"There is but one chance of saving you," whispered Marin. "If you will tell Montcalm what he wants to know he will take you from the Indians. I will go ahead and tell him you will talk and bring back soldiers and remove you to the fort."

"I'll roast in —— before I'll tell Montcalm what he wants to know."

"You'll talk, or roast on the beach opposite Ticonderoga," warned Marin. "We can interfere with our Indians only when there is much to gain."

"You waste your time," muttered Putnam.

"You can't help the provinces by dying at the stake. And our Caughnawagas can keep a man alive for two days."

"I shall never harm the provinces by living," declared the ranger.

"Still, I will go ahead. If you're wise and change your mind we will be ready with your ransom."

"You waste your time," repeated Putnam.

The Indians began to break camp, and Marin glided away to make the fort and return with soldiers. Putnam nursed his aching jaws and waited for the packs to be strapped on his back. But Red Eagle remained seated near the torture post, his brows drawn down in meditation. When the others realized he was in no hurry to take up the march Black Turtle asked him if he was ready.

"They say this man laughed when the flames ate his flesh," slowly replied the Eagle. "If that is true then you did not know how to burn him. No man laughs when the Eagle burns him.

"We can always have brandy at the fort. Why take this man along when we can burn him here and drink our brandy afterward?

"This talk about his laughing at Chaughnawaga fire is not good. Either his *orenda* is stronger than the Eagle's or my brothers have forgotten how to make a fire."

This unexpected speech met with enthusiastic approval. Those warriors busy with the packs abandoned their tasks with alacrity and grouped about Red Eagle.

Marin was gone, and this time the endurance of the white man would be fully measured. The captive's respite would make the spectacle all the more enjoyable. There could be no more subtle method of breaking down a stanch spirit than to withdraw the torture and then renew it. As the Eagle stalked toward his prisoner the Caughnawagas trooped after him, jeering and dancing.

First a shower of rain and then the partizan had saved the ranger, but he could scarcely expect a third intervention. He summoned all his will-power to meet the end bravely.

As the Eagle towered above him and informed him of his doom there came a call from the forest. The savages glared uneasily at the black depths and some of the younger men slipped away to investigate. The Eagle alone gave the voice no heed, but seized Putnam by the arm and helped him to his feet, saying—

"White man, you are about to go into the darkness to find your uncles."

"*Qui vive?*" shouted a voice close at hand.

"*Français!*" called back Putnam.

The Eagle stepped forward to meet the newcomer, his face furrowed by a heavy scowl. A man in the white and black of the Canadian regulars limped into the firelight.

On beholding him the Eagle exclaimed aloud in joy and hastened to help the man gain a mound of packs and recline upon them. Putnam observed that he was an officer, but did not venture to address him. The man swept his gaze over the Indians and the prisoner, and noted the stake. He panted for breath and when able to speak said to the Eagle—

"You owe me a life."

"The Red Eagle's life belongs to his French brother," humbly conceded the chief.

Then to the staring throng:

"My French brother while suffering from a hurt saved the life of the Eagle after we had

left the fighting at the old fort. It was then that the Eagle was separated from his prisoner. The Eagle pays his debts of hate and love."

For a few moments the officer pumped for breath, then pointed a trembling hand at Putnam and faintly said:

"You shall pay your debt with his life. I claim it."

Red Eagle glared at the officer, then at Putnam, his lips twitching. Then with a haughty toss of the head thundered:

"The Eagle pays. When the debt is hard all the more reason why he should pay. His life is yours. Take it!"

And he flung Putnam to his knees before the officer and shoved an ax into the latter's hand.

The officer fingered the ax for a moment, then threw it aside, saying:

"It is well. The Caughnawagas are men of their word. That is why the Great Onontio loves them and will give them back their ancient lands now held by the Long House.

"This man's life is mine. It is for me to say when I will take it. Make a litter of saplings and carry me to the fort. This man shall walk by my side. I am badly hurt. My red brothers must guard my property for me and see it comes to no harm."

He dropped a hand on Putnam's shoulder.

Disgruntled and mutinous at being robbed of their victim a second time, the Indians drew apart and glared menacingly at the newcomer. Black Turtle talked under his breath to those about him. Red Eagle snatched up the ax the officer had rejected, and, striding toward the group, hoarsely demanded:

"Who makes talk about what the Eagle does with his own? Do my feet trip over the broken chain of friendship and kick up an ax from the ground? Or is it only a bad dream sent by evil spirits? Do my brothers want me to break my promise to the man who saved my life, or do I dream it?"

Black Turtle stirred uneasily as the Red Eagle's gaze rested on his slashed face. Finally he said:

"It is good that a Caughnawaga should talk with a straight tongue and keep his promise."

With that he turned and made into the forest to follow the road to Ticonderoga.

Others followed the Turtle, while some remained to make and carry the litter. Putnam whispered to his deliverer—

"I never thought to owe my life to a Frenchman."

This in English. And in English the officer replied:

"Nor did I ever think to owe my life to one of Rogers' Rangers. I am the man with the hole in his leg that you captured and prevented your men from killing. I was abandoned, even as you had ordered, when your men were driven ashore above Sloop Island by some of our soldiers. The wound did not prove serious, but today's fighting opened it up again. Now we are quits, Captain Putnam."

EPHRAIM WILLIS lay on his back on the sweet grass and told war stories to an infant cuddled on his breast.

"And that's about how it happened, younker. He saved my life, then went and got caught and was took to Canada.

"Now don't go to blaming me. I did try to get to him. Didn't I get a crack over the head from a Caughnawaga ax trying to get to him? It was that belt over the head that let me come back here to make your acquaintance.

"But you can't keep the old wolf caged. He's been exchanged. Colonel Peter Schuyler of New Jersey fixed it. You'll see him sometime. He's a Connecticut man, even if he was born in Salem. You're Connecticut, too. Don't ever forget that, you young whelp.

"Well, lemme see what we was saying. Old Loudoun took Louisbourg, and Montcalm come down and took Fort William Henry. It was a horrible mess. But Louisbourg's taken; Frontenac is taken. So give a cheer if you want to."

"Some one coming," called a soft voice from the house.

Willis crawled to his feet and set the baby on his shoulder. As he watched the man coming down the road on horseback his eyes quickened and he set off at a run, the baby squalling and bringing a slim figure from the house in swift pursuit.

"Oh, Lord! If this ain't a sight for sore eyes!" gasped Willis, resting the baby on the saddle and shaking hands with a crushing grip.

"The end is near, lad," said Putnam cheerily. "You must go back with me. There's brave work to be done. Sir Jeffrey Amherst goes against Ticonderoga. General James Wolfe goes to attack Quebec. Where'n sin did you get this youngster you've unloaded on me?"

Willis grinned sheepishly and pointed to the flushed-faced young woman now close at hand.

"Guess she thought the Indians had got him. I got married after quitting the Mohawk village and making Albany. Hooray, Elizabeth! Here's Wolf Putnam back from Montreal and much fighting. I'm going back with him to finish it up. Cap'n, she's a prime Connecticut woman now."

Jan the Rogue's daughter eyed Putnam wistfully, then gave him her hand and took the baby to her breast and resignedly said—

"I knew you would come for him, or send."

"Only for a little while. It is the duty of Connecticut men. Connecticut women always help by saying, 'Go.'"

"Then I say, 'Go.' For my baby is Connecticut born, and I am a Connecticut woman. God will make it end right for mothers and little babies."

Ol' Makaw*

by F. St. Mars

And duller should I lie than some fat weed
That rolls itself at ease on Lethe's wharf.

THE effect of the fireflies, dancing over the oilily sliding waters and in and out between the stately Phœnix palms along the river-bank, was really very pretty. So was the soft and ceaseless concert—Nature's little "jazz"—of bullfrogs, crickets, mosquitoes, cicadas, nightjars—"Hoo-hoo!" and "Chrrrrrr!"—and all the rest. But these only accentuated and did not in any way break the awe-inspiring vastness, mystery, drear, utter, empty lonelineess of the immemorial wilderness night.

Things came and went in the dark. You could hear them—live things that breathed, that rustled, that crept, that crawled, that whispered, that snarled, snorted, sniffed, or—yes—sneezed at long and lonely intervals. Nothing could be seen in the empty murk; far too much could be imagined. One felt that the "lord of creation" had no place there—if indeed he dare remain—except in the trees that he had originally come down from. It was a crushing and a humiliating night.

Then the match spluttered—yea, verily, there even in that scene that was as old as Time—the little light flickered in the great darkness, the tinder-dry grass caught, the sticks followed, and—the camp-fire flared up.

The red flames leaped and danced, and there were the jumping shadows of men going about tethering donkeys and a mule, and putting up the tent-poles. But before ever mallet smote on tent-peg all the donkeys and the one mule stiffened together, and a *voice* as of thunder shattered the brooding stillness of the night. There was no warning, nothing. Nothing, my friends, but that single roaring, half grunt half bellow, crashing over the waters, and the darkness that lived there.

It was followed by five shorter roaring grunts, and by silence, deeper in comparison than any that had gone before. And in the silence, all, holding their breath, could distinctly hear a cavernous suck and gurgle of waters, and the squelching deliberate tread of some mighty feet up the river-bank.

Deliberately It approached—you could feel the very ground vibrate under the footfall—a dim, immense mass growing out of the mysterious gloom. Then followed the vicious stab and flash, and clap of a rifle. And then, and then—help!—once more that roaring grunt deafening all; an immense thudding that rocked the earth; a rush, and blast of air, as something tremendous, formless and growing, fairly rocketed past, a nightmare of confusion; and—darkness! Darkness, I say; utter, absolute and complete dark. The fire was out—had been put out by It, whatever it was—trodden, trampled, scattered, exterminated. At least there were only a few trails of sparks left, and they died. It was as if a steam-roller had charged the camp, and about as cheap.

"It" was an enormous old bull hippopotamus, who reckoned he owned that river reach, and to him all fires were, strangely enough, anathema.

Then, still grunting in tones that shook the breathless dark, he turned and stumped his ponderous way back to the river again. The fire was out. Enough. Slowly his rage simmered down. His mighty mind was appeased.

Now Ol' Makaw, or Kibojo, or Mocow, or Jir, Gno, or Kroki, or Mouba according to the various native tribal tongues, or *Hippopotamus amphibius*, according to Science, or just plain "hippo" according to every-day folk, was well over thirteen feet long, five foot three inches tall, about thirty inches round the biceps, and boasted an armament of one pair of seventeen-inch tusks six inches round, and one pair of eleven-inch tusks five inches in girth, to say nothing of teeth to match. His body was the shape of a fat sausage, his funny short legs like tree-stumps, and his weight four tons, no less. But that was not all. Pig's eyes he had, little pig ears, and a perfectly appalling mouth like a

**This is an Off-the-Trail story. See second contents page.*

Saratoga trunk, capable, I tell *you*, of chopping any little thing like a boat or a lion in half as we chop a biscuit. And it was the mouth that did it. Indeed, when you come to think about it, it had to be. Yet people seem to have overlooked the fact. Nature did not give Ol' Makaw a mouth like that—it seemed too heavy and out of proportion even for his gigantic bulk—just to eat grass with. How could she? No, it was there for a purpose, tusks—which really looked like gigantic front teeth—and all, and that purpose appears to have been the discouragement of crocodiles.

Ol' Makaw stumped back to the river, grunting. He pounded out a peculiar double track, feet deep, with a ridge in the center like unto the track of no other beast, by reason of his great weight, his stumpy legs that took such absurd little fat strides, and the shortness of the same.

Half-way to the river Ol' Makaw stopped. Sight, hearing, smell were all super-sharp with him, but it needed no particularly quick ears, nor specially sharp eyes, to hear the ominous growl, to see the smoldering eyes, that barred his path, that signaled "No road" dead ahead of him.

Ol' Makaw stood quite still, almost meekly, and without a sound, his gigantic mouth resting on the ground, as was his custom, as though it were too heavy for him. But most people stop when they hear that growl at night, anyway—the growl of a hungry lion.

Cats, however, make some silly blunders sometimes, and the lion is the king of all the cats. This one had somehow got between Ol' Makaw and water, barred the old giant's passage along his own beaten road to the river—his river, that "his" being fulfilled; and you can take it from me that the beast that can do that, and stick to it, *and* live, does not exist.

Ol' Makaw's patient quiet was quite misunderstood by Leo Rex, however, who like all cats, was a mighty bluffer himself, and expected others to be also. He could not understand a straightforward character, but—he got it, four tons of it, mouth open like a red cave, tusks gleaming, ground-rocking, roaring grunts deafening as earthquakes. What is more, he got it quick, too, for the speed of monstrous Ol' Makaw's charge was only one degree less surprising than its suddenness. It was over in a jiff—just a rush like a landslide, and—gone. But, on the word of one who has had to face it, it was terribly disconcerting.

And that rush caught that lion in his weak spot—his heel of Achilles, so to speak. All cats get rattled when they are hustled; the lion no less, because *he* does not expect to be hustled. The lion lost his head. For one brief fraction of a second he tried to go every way at once, so to say. For one minute space of time he failed to exert that almost miraculous quickness of movement for which he was famous. And the result was absurd. He got his lithe body out of the way all right, but not his tail! Ol' Makaw trod on his tail—stamped it into the soft ground about a foot deep, as if smitten under a pile-driver. Of course Ol' Makaw did not know—or care if he had. What is a tail more or less to four living tons of pachyderm anyway? He had aimed to chop Leo Rex into two pieces, not tread on his caudal appendage.

Ol' Makaw passed straight on.

So did the lion, and the thunder of his remarks shook the night.

Intensely sensitive to pain—like all his highly strung tribe—the king flung himself in an extremity of rage upon the old bull "hippo" as he passed; and like a burr and all cats, when they are really "het up," where he landed, he stuck.

Ol' Makaw stumped on. Ol' Makaw was a remarkable beast; his naked browny skin—pink like piggy under the arm-pits—was inches thick. No one from the listening camp could find any blood on his trail next day; yet who else, who, I say, could carry that terrible jockey—and live?

Ol' Makaw, still keeping to his own-made path, came in quick time to his own-made, slippery, muddy chute down the steep river-bank; and still going at full plod, and in pitch darkness, Ol' Makaw shot his chute, as a few tons of cliff slides into the sea—splosh! It really was most stupendous, and the waves he kicked up were great.

The lion came up grandly on the top of one wave, spitting and swearing like ten thousand cats rolled into one—scandalized, undignified, annoyed beyond words. What is more, though I, and he even, would have said it could not be done, he got up that steep overhanging bank—without any "take off" mind—in one convulsive spring. Like the dingo in the story. The beggar could not climb, but he got up the tree. He had to. The dogs were after him. In other words, Leo's tail bled, and the scent of blood brought the, till then, apparently non-existent crocodiles on to the spot before you could yell, "Knife!"

After that the lion retired into the dark, dark bush after the manner of a receding thunderstorm, and the old bull hippo taunted him in the voice of a fog-horn as he went.

Then Ol' Makaw, whose temper had been very violently upset, sank like a stone, and still bellowing—you could hear him right through the water from the depths of the river, which always struck me as a peculiar thing—galloped along the bottom with his yawning cavern of a mouth open, and chased the crocodiles. Truly few things are faster under the water than a crocodile chasing, but one of them is a crocodile being chased; and the extraordinary rapidity with which there became a dearth of crocodiles in that place was a wonderful exhibition of the cunning of those horrible saurians, for one thing,

and a white light upon the *raison d'être* of the hippopotamus' mouth, for another.

Thereafter Ol' Makaw cooled down, and ponderous, and once more sedate, wandered off on the other side of the river to find a few hundredweight of that precise kind of long coarse grass he most affected for his wholesale supper. And it was during the course of this ramble that he came upon the fence. It was quite a good fence—for natives. It was quite three feet high, and I feel almost certain it might have kept out a flock of sheep from the *shambas*—English, fields—of mealies, beans and pumpkins it protected beyond, but any self-respecting bull would have simply strolled through it, or a crusty old cow either, for that matter. But it stopped Ol' Makaw. I say that this low structure stopped the four-ton "hippo." Why? Why, my friends, because it was *artificial*. That was the rub—the fence was artificial. Enough. Apparently Ol' Makaw possessed more brains than people gave him credit for; more anyway than his cousins the bush pigs, or the ugly warthogs, or many of the antelope folk. In a country, however, where anything artificial in your path may turn with disconcerting suddenness into a ten-foot pit-fall, staked and spiked at the bottom, too, or a weighted spear-head dropping on to the scruff of your neck from nowhere, you do wisely to avoid things artificial—especially if they are not accompanied by fire, which always drove the hippo into a sudden rage—with care and precision, and to stick to good old Nature. Wherefore, Ol' Makaw did just that—for though pumpkins are good, life is better—and got back to the river with a whole skin and a full stomach—my, but it took some filling—as day was beginning to dawn.

The sun, with swords of gold cutting the carded night mists asunder along the river hollow, brought the white hunter, more or less controlling a double five hundred express rifle, a terrible weapon, a regular siege gun. Apparently having his fire put out still rankled with him.

"Where," growled he, "is that—(Assuan) hippo?"

But the "hippo" was not.

The river was bare. No reed or cover broke its oily current, but no head of Ol' Makaw coming up to breathe broke it either. The magic—black magic, the hunter said it was as he tramped the banks and the heat began to make him sweat—was complete.

Ol' Makaw, thick skin, tusks, and all—all thirteen feet of him—had apparently dissolved with the mists of dawn. Wherefore, after two hours, the hunter gave it up. He had to; his stock of language ran out.

Yet Ol' Makaw was there all the time, good sirs and mesdames, truly. There, and only two hundred yards away.

It was but a little pool, a backwater, covered with green slime; overarched with palmites and scrub, full of the nests, as they were gigantic hanging pears, of weaver finches; ringed with tall acacia trees; horrible with scum-covered water turtles, crocodile, and water snakes; abode of night herons, divers, hammerhead storks, pennant-winged nightjars, and myriads of little silvery fish.

Across one end of his pool lay a fallen tree, bearded with curtain moss, heavy with weed; and exactly under it, festooned with green scum, the two ears, like knobs, two eyes on knobs, and two nostrils opening upwards—exactly five inches above the surface—of Ol' Makaw rose from time to time to learn how the world was getting on.

At the slighest rustle he sank; at the least whiff of tainted air he went under. You could have searched for half a week and never found him; would never have thought probably of looking for so vast a bulk in so confined a space, when there was so much room outside.

THE glaring day boiled itself out; the swift dusk of the tropics slid into night. The camp and the white hunter—delayed somewhat by the search for the stampeded donkeys and the one mule—had passed on, leaving all once more to mystery, silence, and the "discomfortable" moon.

Then, and not till then, knowing apparently very well that no power on earth would tempt the local natives out of their stockaded village after "the hour of pride and power, of talon and tusk and claw," Ol' Makaw drifted out of his retreat and down river toward Lake Zim. For years it had been the custom of this lonely old bull to perform a little evening ritual—to slip down river to a sand-bank that partly, except in the rainy season, stretched out between its mouth and the salt waters of Lake Zim; to climb out thereon, and send forth, over the dark mysterious watery waste of the lake, his grunting roaring challenge. That accomplished, he would shut his appalling mouth with a clash like the closing of a strong-room doors, and stand motionless, chin on sand, listening for the answering antediluvian bellow from his own kind that never came.

Ol' Makaw showed, shadowy, tremendous, and a-magnified in the gloom as he left the water without a sound—and that is not easy to do—and hoisted himself slowly upon the sand-spit. He stood there for a moment, a stupendous relic of the past, just as his ultimate dim ancestor may have stood looking out over that unchanging immemorial wilderness scene in the Tertiary Age. Then he opened the red portcullis of his mouth to deliver his nightly challenge, drew a deep breath (as only submarine beasts can) and—shut it again! That thunderous defiance was, for the first time

in years, and years, and years, never given.

Instead was empty, watery silence, and in the silence could be distinctly heard the rush of waves thrown up by some monster beast swimming rapidly along the shore of the lake. It approached at speed, that animal, and became a submarine-like dark mass deeper than the surrounding dark on the face of the waters. Swiftly it passed, crossing the mouth of the river, and onward into the night. It had not seen Ol' Makaw simply because Ol' Makaw had been standing motionless, rigid as a polished carven monument; his huge square chin resting, as if in thought, upon the ground; his little piggy eyes watching, watching, watching as they had never watched before. In short, he knew he was beholding another hippopotamus, and a female one. And when you remember that never in all the years that Ol' Makaw had lived in the river and upon the waters of Lake Zim had he seen, heard, scented, or beheld the footprints even of another of his own kind, you will realize what the vision he had just been vouchsafed, meant to him.

Whereafter came to the disproportionately small, but plenty sharp, ears of Ol' Makaw gurglings, splashings, grunts, snorts, and the sounds as if the god the natives supposed to live in the lake was taking his bath. But Ol' Makaw knew better than mere savage man. It was the sportings of a herd of hippopotamuses really he could hear—for never were such sociable, playful giants as hippopotamuses.

And Ol' Makaw? Oh, he sank, and with considerably less noise than any stone. He sank, and the newly arrived herd of hippopotamuses—come from far up some river 'way across on the other side of the lake probably—came out upon the very sand-spit he had but just vacated, showing like polished stone monster carvings in the moonlight—smooth as glass.

Ol' Makaw sank, I repeat; and the moonlight, an hour later, gave away his colossal presence nearly a mile inland, gathering the five bushels of vegetation necessary to feed the furnace of his eleven-foot stomach—they tell me it was eleven feet, but I did not measure it; I only know it was disproportionate even for so large a beast—to keep up the life fires, and the fat with which he, in common with so many submarine animals, was covered.

Now there is an hour before dawn when it is not good to be awake. They say that more lives pass out in that hour than in any other of the twenty-four. It is the coldest, most cruel hour, a lugubrious, long hour. On that night also it was the darkest hour after the moon. Oddly enough, 'tis said it is the hour of birth as well as death.

In that hour it was, then, that Ol' Makaw, drifting down stream, silent as a cloud drifts across the face of the moon, and with only his eyes showing, those little but intelligent protruding eyes that saw so much, came unto the hippo herd, fresh from a night's feeding, strung out along the sand-spit. Practically speaking they were mere huge smudges in the dark—the cow with her calf, the cow expecting a calf, the old fat cow fast asleep, the old lean cow (lean for a hippo) very wide awake, the middle-aged cows, three in number, lying half awash, the young bull, the very young bull, and the great big adult bull, which latter was flirting with the "beautiful" young cow hippo in a far corner. He was indeed a very big bull, or a very fat one anyway, bigger even than Ol' Makaw, but younger and with smaller tusks—a bull in his prime, fit to fight for his life, or love, against the world.

Ol' Makaw came up out of the depths and climbed out upon the sand-spit all dripping, but otherwise with startling silence for so gigantic a beast. He did it as if he had a peculiar right there; which indeed, if you come to think of it, he had. And in silence, too, he confronted the pair.

The cow hippopotamus at the other end of the sand-spit snorted not less loudly than a freight locomotive on an up-grade. The young bull, and the very young bull, grunted pig grunts a thousand times magnified. The young cow said nothing, and—the big bull bellowed a roaring bellow that rolled all across the still lake and up into the dim hills and back again.

Then the young cow retired waterward and thoughtfully, as if she had not seen either bull, and the two leviathans charged at one another with cavernous mouths agape.

With such jaws, with such tusks, no fight could hope to be a light matter. The teeth of both clashed as they met, like the shutting of steel-barred gates.

Ol' Makaw, somewhat the lighter of the two—or the less heavy, shall we say?—gave back a little in the push tactics that followed. But Ol' Makaw, the lighter, cleared himself with more agility—agility in a hippo sounds absurd, but it was quite marvelous really—than the big fat bull. Nay, more; he was in again with a short, sharp charge, and, playing the pigs' trump-card, got under—not over, as many beasts try to—his foe's guard. For this he took a scrunch on the shoulder that would have chopped any ordinary beast in two. Like whales, the larger seals, and others, however, Ol' Makaw's covering of fat under skin inches thick could take wounds calmly that would kill anything else. He took, therefore, and ripping upward, the terrible, slashing upstroke of all the pigs, cut into the big bull's chest deep and true. The latter acknowledged receipt with a roar that was heard at the native village miles away; half blundered sidewise, and from that moment was never given a chance to turn and slash back.

Ol' Makaw remorselessly kept right under

him, slashing up with appalling lifts that would have uprooted trees.

The big bull, roaring horribly, blundered sidewise to the water. As he half fell, half dived in, he slashed at Ol' Makaw's head, and—Ol' Makaw stopped dead. For a moment he remained motionless, blowing like a grampus. Then he turned in the very moment of victory, as if something had happened to beat him, or his courage had given way, turned, dived into the depths, and—vanished.

Thereafter the big bull climbed out again and roared the bellow of victory, and none arose to say him nay. Only, up the river, in the little deep pool in the side-stream, under the fallen tree, Ol' Makaw's vertical protruding nostrils uprose and shot out a jet of water and air with the quiet snort of an exhaust pipe. *And*, miles away, the natives of the village were furiously making ready their canoes for the hippopotamus hunt that cunning old Ol' Makaw had denied to them for so many years. They had heard the sounds of the battle by night. They were in the throes of a famine, and a hippopotamus slain meant good meat, free meat, for all and to spare. But, remember this: If you will know Ol' Makaw at all, you will know that it was not the other bull hippo that had beaten him.

It was day. Dawn had crept up unnoticed while the fight was on; and very terribly had it been driven into Ol' Makaw's brain during the many and many years of his lonely past that never—no never—must he be seen abroad by day. Even now, as he breathed hard—reddening the water of the pool, by the way, for like his opponent he was no sight to greet the morn—the dawn wind came rushing back from letting in the sun, the birds began to call, and with a clamor and a clang almost—it was day.

Time passed—ah, but there is no such thing as Time south of the Mediterranean. The heat grew, and grew, and grew like an intolerable tourniquet. The hum of innumerable insects hung on the stagnant air like the ceaseless song of telegraph-wires. The doves—the doves, invisible among the foliage, kept up an everlastingly repeated: "Chock-taw! Chock-taw!" that became almost maddening. Then—and then the regular beat of paddles, heard, as sound can be heard, from afar across the still waters of Lake Zim.

It was then that Ol' Makaw showed the first visible sign for hours past of life. He flicked one mobile ear, and thereby drowned a big fly, with a bigger hum, whose proboscis seemed capable of miraculously penetrating even his hide shield.

Followed, after due pause, the thud of paddles growing rapidly—a shout, gigantic snorts, plungings, another shout, a short, sharp, grunting bellow, and—pandemonium.

Then Ol' Makaw sank out of sight beneath the green scum as a picture that fades on the film.

'TWAS a most exciting hunt; though Lake Zim, which had beheld many a hunt of man and beast, remained as placid as a sheet of silver. The young cow hippopotamus had been well hit by a lance from one canoe.

If that was all, however, little would it have mattered; what is one lance more or less over the vast surface of a hippopotamus? This lance, though, had a detachable head; the head a long length of cord; the cord at its other end a lump of that very light wood, the ambach, tied to it, and the wood, floating always, was hissing along the surface of Lake Zim, revealing every twist and turn of the frantic diving cow hippo to a perfect cloud of canoes, hovering, racing, darting, swift and hawk-like, after it, ready to riddle her with more lances every time she came up to breathe—as come up she must.

But the hippopotamus herd, and the big fat bull? Look you. See those little jets, as of steam, receding minute by minute far across Lake Zim? Those were the herd. One of them represented the exhaling nostrils of the big fat bull.

And once, twice, and again men could plainly hear, as they paddled excitedly, the cow hippo bellowing at the bottom of the lake to the herd, *her* herd that would never hear.

Ah! But it was the suddenness of it that was so terrible; the unexpectedness, the deadly, mute swiftness, the absolute lack of any kind of a warning.

A canoe, the nearest canoe to the young cow hippo, now exhausted and about to rise, rose, rose bodily up on end, paused for a moment, and capsized, stern first, decanting its inmates in one general slide of black limbs, lances, rope and paddles, into the salt waters of Lake Zim.

The simmering air filled with yells as the air fills with humming flies above a disturbed carcass; rose to a howl; and died in one long wail as jaws, even the jaws of Ol' Makaw, were seen to rise up, to open, to shadow, to tower over a second canoe. Then those jaws shut—but it was like unto the clash of arena gates—and—there was no canoe, nor anything that could by any stretch of imagination be called a canoe.

Only there were a few splinters of wood bobbing about in the greasy swirling eddies, and a black and woolly head swimming silently shoreward, as they frantically swim who are pursued in nightmares. One native only? Why, yes. There were reasons—and I guess they were good—why the rest of what had been the crew of that canoe that had been did not accompany him. Understand?

TIME—but there is no such thing as time on the Equator—steamed on and there was a faint, faint *double* sucking gurgle in the shadow under the fallen tree across one end of the secret pool among the trees. But it was a smaller sound than that made by the beastly little water turtle, who seemed to waste the whole of the time given him here on earth in weary, futile endeavors to climb up the steep, muddy sides of that pool of horrors.

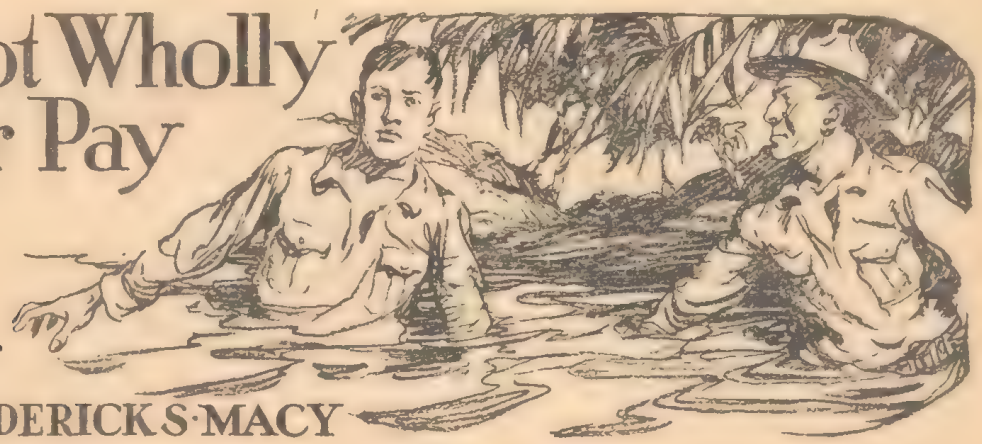
The slime under the fallen tree lifted two—or it may have been three—inches, revealing just four ears, four prominent eyes, vertical nostrils, and —a lump of that very light wood, the ambach.

Verily had Ol' Makaw come home, bringing his bride with him.

And the old, old crocodile, who had always occupied the mud-shore at the far end of the pool, probably owing to the giant hippo's laziness, decided, though a giant himself, that when cow hippos came to the pool in company with the lord thereof, it was time and time to go, and so he did.

The placid waters of Lake Zim—well used to death and strife, to love and life, of man and beast—sparkled on, unruffled by even one canoe upon her silvery surface.

Not Wholly for Pay



By FREDERICK S. MACY

ALONG the coral road that in 1900 linked Bato and Allegria on the Island of Leyte, a cumbersome, old-fashioned ambulance drawn by four mules creaked its way with tropic slowness. Within its stifling interior dozed a major and paymaster, stout, sudorific and impatient. At his feet a steel chest held a fortune in Government funds. Upon the driver's seat a keen-eyed mule-skinner watched alternately his bobbing beasts and the wayside tangle of bamboo and vines. Behind trudged a guard of two privates.

They debouched into a coconut grove where the road skirted the white sea-sand and a shallow stream from the hills prattled and gurgled in a merry run to the deep.

"Will the major have dinner here? It's cool under the trees and I can water the animals besides."

The major climbed out, yawned, stretched himself and appraised the surroundings.

"Drive your team in here and get it behind the undergrowth out of sight of the road. This looks pretty good to me."

The guard came up, threw off their accouterments with sighs of relief and seated themselves by the ambulance. There in the grove these four had coffee, canned beans and hardtack, which make a good meal as any old-timer knows.

But the major yearned for his club in Cebu, a cool, clean, white uniform, a fizzy glass of Scotch and the native stringed orchestra that aided Headquarters to while away the evenings.

"How much farther is it to Allegria?" he inquired.

" 'Bout eight miles, sir," chorused the guard.

"Do you mean to tell me we've only gone ten miles since daylight?"

"That's all, sir," affirmed the mule-skinner. "A rest halt every hour, you know, sir, and mules is slow in this heat; slower'n men, sir."

"Ye-ah!" agreed the major. "What time do you expect to get in?"

The mule-skinner spat deliberately, hitched at his breeches and without turning round—he was overhauling his "gear"—replied shortly:

"Four o'clock. That is," he added as if to express his dislike for officers in general and for this major in particular, "that is, if we get in at all."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded

the major, purpling. "How 'get in at all'?"

"There's no being sure about anything in this country, you know, sir," replied the mule-skinner, testing a snaffle. " 'Most anything might happen from a spent beast to a raid. Lots in these jungles besides parrots. Got to go easy all round."

"Ye-ah! Too bad the Government hasn't the benefit of your perception, isn't it? What time does that boat leave Allegria tomorrow?"

"Afternoon, if it gets in. Doesn't always get in."

"You're a pessimistic son-of-a-gun, aren't you? Well, get on when you're ready. If I get that battalion paid off in the morning I guess there'll be a way out before the day's over."

They were again on the road, the major behind the hot curtains, the contemplative mule-skinner indifferent to boats and battalions alike, the guard laboring behind, through shade and sunshine, over hills and across fords, past sea-beach and fluttering, silent, anxious jungle, while dust streaked their sodden faces and the sweat of their march oozed out through their flannel shirts.

"—— of a life," growled one, a lank, bony-faced youth with sun-pinched wrinkles around his scorched, gray eyes.

"Uh-huh," agreed his companion, a sullen-seeming youngster whose face was oval like a girl's with drooping, slightly sneering lips, and eyes that were brown and large yet without life in their depths.

"An' all for thirteen bucks per, more or less."

"Uh-huh."

"How much more time ye got to do?"

"Two years, a month 'n' a butt."

"This yer first hitch?"

"Uh-huh."

"Me, I've got in two hitches. I'll never take on again."

"Me neither."

There was silence for a space while they measured off nearly a mile, step by dragging step.

"An' all for thirteen per," repeated the first.

"Uh-huh."

There was another pause. Then he resumed:

"Money enough in that box there in that ambulance to fix a felluh for life. Only it's government money, eh?"

"Uh-huh."

"Lots of good we'd be in case of attack, wouldn't we' What d'ye s'pose they sent just us two for?"

"Never been a shot fired anywhere in these parts."

"I heard that over on Cebu once, an' all of a sudden an escort of twenty men was clean wiped out in less'n an hour."

"How about that money in case of attack, eh?"

"Gu-gus would get it, o' course."

"Sure, Mike! An' us too."

"Uh-huh."

"Would you stay with it or beat it?"

"Guess the major would take care of us, wouldn't he?"

" 'Hold 'em off as long as possible, but avoid capture; eh? That's what a real officer would do. I don't know about this major, though. He's got one of them coffee-coolin' jobs."

"Uh-huh."

"Too bad to let them gu-gus get all that money, though, wouldn't it?"

"Sure would."

"S'posin' we could get away with it. Why wouldn't it be all right, eh? The Gov'ment would have lost it anyway, an' I guess we would've earned it, wouldn't we? Anyway the Gov'ment wouldn't never miss it. Fortune for us but nothin' at all for the Gov'ment."

"Prob'ly not. We ain't attacked yet, though. Anyway that sort o' talk ain't good soldierin'."

"Soldierin' nothin'. Don't tell me yer' satisfied on thirteen per. Say! Just because I'm a soldier's no reason why I should be broke all the time and no fair show for nothin', if I had a chance to get a pile that wouldn't hurt nobody else an' would be lost anyhow if I didn't get it.

"Didn't you tell me yourself a ways back that you wasn't goin' to take on again? That's all there is to soldierin' in you, an' you know it. Course, I was only just talkin' anyway, you know. You understand that, don't you?"

"Sure. Just s'posin' in case it was a showdown between us an' the gu-gus as to which got the money, it bein' as good as lost to the Gov'ment."

"That's it, all right. Same as findin' it, you know. An' say! Think of it! Fixed for life with everything you want! Gee!"

"Uh-huh! Say! Wake up!"

IT WAS time for the hourly rest and they halted in the shade of a great mango. The mule-skinner came down from his seat and stretched his stiff limbs. The guard removed their encumbrances and lay prone on the warm sward. Nothing stirred in the bush around them, nor was there any sound save the clank of a bit in a beast's mouth or the rattle of chains at the traces. Overhead the sky burned to a faint afternoon bronze, and not far away curly little steam-wraiths danced on the white sea.

Again they took up the tread.

"I been thinkin' about what you was sayin', Lanky," began the brown-eyed one. "Mebbe there'd be somethin' in it after all if we was attacked."

"Ain't never been a shot fired round here, though," commented Lanky cautiously as if

to remind his companion of a change of front.

"Well, there might be, same as you said about that escort over on Cebu when I said the same thing."

"Can't tell, of course."

"In case there was, don't know but I'd think the same as you."

"You're only talkin', I guess, same as I was."

"I am if you are; if you ain't I ain't."

"Is that straight goods?"

"Uh-huh."

"Then shake on it."

And thus they sealed their compact. After a thoughtful silence the brown-eyed one asked—

"How would we get it, though?"

"Well, in any case, the gu-gus would see to it that the ambulance didn't get far away. We'd just have to watch our chance an' stick together."

"An' then, s'posin' we did get away with it, what then?"

"Bust the padlock on that old Spanish safe, stow the money an' get away to Hong Kong. We could make Cebu this time o' year on any o'them native boats."

"Uh-huh."

"No trouble at all to get some cits clothes in Cebu, an' then for a steamer; eh? Cebu's an open port now, you know. Nobody knows us there, neither. Anyway we'd be supposed to be dead. No one 'ud be lookin' for us."

"Uh-huh."

"Oh, well! What's the use o' talkin'? No chance."

But each dreamed his own dreams of the life he would live with his wealth, until the somber prospect of continuing the bitter present into a dark future became intolerable. They looked now upon the lurid glow of riches and then upon black poverty and the painful labor for daily bread of penniless old age. Desire passed through visions to necessity and evoked the primal law of possession.

"An' there it is, right there, felluh, waitin' for us to take it."

"Uh-huh."

"Well, we could take it, you know."

"Mebbe so. How, 'Lanky'? I won't stand for no rough work, though."

"Don't have to. You know where the trail turns to that slick wet clay, that red stuff, just this side of Allegria?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, there's one place, y' mind, where you can just get a wagon past the edge of a mighty steep slope."

"Uh-huh."

"Well, even going slow, a rock chucked under the nigh hind wheel would slip the whole end off the trail, wouldn't it? Just like that escort wagon did last week. An' how long d'ye think it would take that old box to slide out an' go end over end down that incline into the jungle, eh? An' while the major was wakin' up an' climbin' on to his feet an' Joe was pullin' his team out I guess it'ud be up to us to chase after it, wouldn't it?"

"Uh-huh."

"An' I guess 'twould be pretty durned hard to find it when we got through with it, wouldn't it? Lift yer feet an' step up, boy; it's as good as done."

And yet, though the hard, hot road should have sprung from under them like a soft carpet, though the delights they had conjured should have blotted out the glare of the coppery sun, there was still a weight in their hearts and a drag at their heels.

At the next halt the mule-skinner joined them for a smoke. He was unusually gloomy on this particular day and overwise, as mule-skinners ever profess to be.

"Why so glum, Joe?"

"Say, Lanky, an' you too, young felluh, have you stopped to think that this is the first time a paymaster has ever gone over this road? No? Well, it is, an' what's more the whole whole town of Bato knew all about it for the simple reason that our men got paid off yesterday an' they seen this outfit pull out this morning. You don't have to tell a gu-gu any more than that. I seen them in their doorways when we was leavin' town makin' out they was asleep or jest wakin' up.

"Mark me, we ain't got to Allegria yet. An' the C. O. sendin' two men fer guard 'stead of a half a comp'ny!"

"Ain't everything peaceful, Joe?" Lanky ventured.

"These natives round here? Peaceful? Huh! Nothin' to make 'em anything else, up to now. I wish we was through that's all."

"Oh, we'll make it all right, Joe. Nothin' doin' yet."

But he nudged his companion reflectively.

"Did y' hear him?" he asked when Joe had returned to his beasts.

"Uh-huh."

"Luck comin' our way, mebbe."

"Mebbe."

The major ceased his sleepy droning and peered out.

"What are you hanging around here for?" he demanded.

"Got to rest the mules, sir."

"Ye-ah! How long you been resting the mules, eh?"

" 'Bout ten minutes, sir."

"Ye-ah! How much farther is it to that town?"

" 'Bout an hour an' a half, sir."

"Resting plenty, eh? You'd rest here all night, I suppose, if you could. Get 'em going!"

He withdrew into his concealment.

Lanky ground his teeth. He cursed very softly and carefully.

"I'll hand you something, you fat desk warrior, if I ever get a chance. Come on, young felluh."

BEFORE them the road led between two thickets to a ford at a swift, hissing, black stream. When they had nearly reached it the mule-skinner pulled in shortly.

"There's a native just gone down-stream in a *barroto*," he announced ominously.

"Well," complained the major, "what of it? How deep is it?"

" 'Bout hub deep."

"Well, that's deep enough to float a *barroto*, isn't it? That's what it's for, isn't it? You aren't afraid of one, are you?"

"No, I ain't!" snarled Joe furiously. "An' I ain't no soldier, neither, to be ragged by no one. I'll go on all right jest as far as you like, but I'll tell you right now that there's nothin' up or down this stream for a *barroto*. Hike, you mules!"

He set his jaw on his quid and took a fresh grip on his lines.

"Watch out now," he called back.

The major had no time to reply. With a splash and a bound the old ambulance took the river. It bounded and swayed toward mid-stream, obedient to mules that lunged and strained, up to their girths in the swirl, urged by the lash and the curses of a challenged driver.

"Easy, there!" roared the major.

"Easy, ——!" retorted Joe. "There's no time to lose, I'm thinkin'!"

And then there was a crash of firearms from the road and the bank of the stream they had left, and a sound like bees swarming.

Quietly the major tapped Joe on the shoulder.

"Halt," he commanded.

"Halt!" repeated Joe, surprized. "What for?"

"Because I'll shoot you if you don't," the major replied softly. "Dismount."

The mule-skinner suddenly developed an admirable sense of obedience and dropped into the water.

"Now keep down as low as you can in the water and make for the other side. You two men close up here with me. Don't return the fire unless they come after us or you can see a target. Keep down!"

In this manner, with their bodies as nearly submerged as possible, they continued to cross the river, tilted against its whirling current. Little splashes all around them plopped up in response to the furious discharges behind them, and mingled with these were occasional shouts.

"Steady now!" cautioned the major as they approached the bank. "Gather close and stand up a moment. Stand squarely behind the ambulance so that the natives can not see into it. I think the box will slide out as the front rises. There, that's it! Don't let those devils see it. Let it down into the stream and stay down with it.

"Now Joe, turn the mules loose. Give them the whip for a good start. Send them up the road. That's it!"

Out of the hindering swirl, with familiar hard coral beneath their shoes, the mule team clattered wildly toward Allegria. But not a hundred yards ahead an ambush opened, yet not from near, for gu-gus fear mules and American horses as they do American marksmanship.

"Thought so!" chuckled the major. "But the team got through at that. Lordy, see 'em go! Good thing gu-gus can't shoot, isn't it?"

"They're coming across with bolos," announced Lanky, and opened fire.

Two rifles and two revolvers were their only weapons, but every shot scored. The natives retreated to cover.

"They'll be after us again in a moment," observed the major. "We'll commence firing into the brush as soon as they open up on us. When I give the word you two men jump up and begin shooting. Then you, Lanky, throw up your hands as if you were hit and drop into the water. Hang on to your rifle, though. And then—" turning to the brown-eyed one—" you do the same.

"Note that fringe of nipa palms along the edge of the swamp on this side, down-stream. Keep your heads below all you can. Stay close to the bank and come up for air in the shadow under it, face toward it. Drag the box along with you. Make for those nipas and hide under them. The driver and I will work past you down-stream.

"Guard that box till you are relieved, if possible. In case some gu-gu should find you use the bayonet. Don't shoot. If necessary to save your lives, do what seems best. I'll join you if I can. Understand?

They understood, but Joe protested against the silence of two rifles at such a time.

The major cursed him.

"Your first duty," he said, "even if you are a civilian, is to obey your orders, which are to do your share toward saving those funds and getting them to where the Government sent them. And I'd as soon shoot an American who fails in his duty as a gu-gu who attacks me. D'ye hear me? All I want of you is for you to save your skin and get word to Allegria. You know your duty; now do it."

The fusillade broke forth again from the cover of the jungle.

"Spread out, everybody," shouted the major as they returned the fire. "Keep down and work toward the bank. Keep moving down-stream. That's good. Now, driver, you

follow me out into the stream when I start. There! We're close enough to the shadows, now. Go ahead, you men."

Lanky rose to his full height and fired a few rounds carefully. Then he threw up both arms, sent forth a piercing yell and fell face downward into the water. A great shout arose from the natives on the far side.

Then the brown-eyed lad rose shouting definace, and made as if to charge his enemies. But he took only a step, for suddenly with a strange gesture he turned himself half-around and collapsed.

"Well done! Now, Joe, these men are supposed to be dead. Come on with me as fast as you can down-stream. Try for the beach and then to Allegria. The chances are you won't find a soul on the way. They'll all be here, looking for that money. Maybe a woman or so, but don't let them see you."

"Nothing doing," rebelled Joe, yet half-floating, half-running toward the sea with the tumbling current.

"I'm beggin' your pardon, major," he continued between well directed shots with his revolver. "I know a man when I see one, an' I guess I know my duty, too. If they get you, they get me."

"Thanks, Joe, but if you get to the post you can save all of us. My place is here. You can make it if you are careful. And hurry! When those devils find that the safe isn't in the ambulance, and I suppose they overhauled it before it got very far, they'll search every inch of this stream-bed. It's only a question of a few hours until they find us. So it's up to you. Got enough ammunition?"

"Got as much as you have, I guess."

The major smiled grimly.

"All right, Joe. Hike, now! Better just disappear like the others. I shall do it myself in a few minutes. Play dead."

FORTUNATELY for them the pursuit was less than half-hearted. To magnify an apparent victory into the extermination of the entire American Army was an easy matter at any time. But the certainty of an unequaled national treasure—for certainly so much must be in the possession of the great paymaster—for spoils, greatly facilitated the process.

Few cared to wander far from the spot where that treasury was supposed to be. It was much simpler to consider the guardians of it dead than to follow them. Parties from both sides of the river met, crossed and recrossed.

And while they explored the ford and thence moved slowly down stream, Lanky and his companion hid their faces in the black mud of the bordering swamp and made their way to a spot where the nipas, like giant ferns, curled over to the brown flood and hid them as in a maze of curtains.

Neither spoke for a time, chest deep in the current.

Then the brown-eyed, girl-faced youth whispered, but not joyfully—

"Well, we got the box, Lanky."

"Yes, we got it all right."

"It wasn't heavy, at that."

" 'Course not. 'Twas in the water."

"Uh-huh. Hadn't thought o' that."

They said no more during a long hour.

"We can get it down to the beach easy after dark; that is, if the gu-gus don't get us in the mean time."

"Uh-huh. They're 'way up-stream yet, though."

Sunset impended, but yet the natives searched.

"They won't get to us by night," argued Lanky.

There was no reply.

"What's the matter, young felluh?"

"Guess m' head's hit."

"Bad?"

"Nope. But it makes me a little sick. It hurts. 'Taint nothin' though."

Eventually the short twilight glowed and then rapidly dimmed.

"Say, Lanky, that major's some officer, ain't he?"

"You bet!"

"Wonder if he got through?"

"Hope so."

It was dark.

"We can make a slow start if you like, young felluh. I don't hear nothin'."

"Where we goin', Lanky?"

There was a challenge in his voice. Lanky did not reply for a moment. Then he said;

"Guess we're goin' to turn this here money into headquarters at Allegria, ain't we? Ain't that what we come for?"

"Sure is, Lanky; that's what we come for."

"An' we ain't done nothin', ever, but straight soldierin', have we?"

"Nothin' but straight soldierin', Lanky."

"That's what we've always said, ain't it? An' nobody ——"

But there were loud shouts at the ford, heard plainly in the still, evening air; good American throats calling them, and the voice of the major, near them, in answer.

"Them's our own people, callin' us," said Lanky.

"Uh-huh."

Helped by a Horse Doctor

by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "The Color of His Boots," "Assisting Ananias," etc.

IN THE middle of the cabin stood Magpie Simpkins, my pardner, and facing him is a fat *hombre*, dressed like a cross between a short-card artist and a per-fume peddler. They don't see me. From the expression on their faces, I'd say that their minds are null and void as far as I'm concerned.

Magpie ain't got no gun on his hip, which is unusual, and I can see by the expression in his eyes that he's laboring under a heavy strain.

The fat feller lifts one hand above his head, spreads the fingers and then shuts all but two. Magpie gazes upon that hand with awe in his eyes, and then up goes the fat feller's other hand with the first and second fingers crossed. Then the fat man drops his right hand and rubs his finger across his nose.

Magpie's eyes are as wide as saucers and the perspiration seems to gather on his noble brow. Then Magpie lifts his right hand even with his ear, sticks his thumb in said ear and wiggles his fingers.

All to once I gets the solution of the mystery. This fat feller is one of them hypnotist *hombres*, and he's got poor Magpie into a spell.

With the Harper tribe, to think is to act so I bent my gun over the hypnotist's head. He slumps to the floor and Magpie stares at me, leaning on our table to support his wobbly legs.

"As soon as he gets rational I'll have him snap his fingers and bring you back," says I, rolling a smoke.

Magpie stares at me.

"Yeah?" says he foolish-like. "Bring me back?"

"Uh-huh. Just take it easy, old-timer. You likely think you're Napoleon Bonaparte or Paul Revere right now, so I won't start no arguments. Just hang on to yourself and I'll hoodle this here brain-mixer into bringing you up to date. *Sabe?*"

I don't know yet what Magpie hit me with, but I suspicion the sirup pitcher, it being the only thing of that weight on the table. I fell plumb out into the yard and retaliates by heezing three .44's through the closed door. I felt insulted a lot. I went up to see Doc Milliken, the horse doctor, and he takes three stitches in my alabaster brow with a sack-needle and binding-twine.

I asks him what he knows about hypnotism, and he says—

"Ike, you wasn't hypnotized—you was assassinatized."

I asks him if a feller could be hypnotized to such an extent that he'd throw a pitcher at his best friend.

"Well," says Doc, "I reckon he would. A feller you can stick pins into without hurting him is liable to do anything. You see, Ike, his mind could be influenced by the hypnotist. Did Magpie hit you?"

"According to science, Doc, it wasn't Magpie throwed the pitcher, but he must 'a' been influenced by another party."

"Yeah," says Doc. "After looking at the cut you got, Ike, I'd say it was the Democrat or Republican party."

Then I meets "Dirty Shirt" Jones. Dirty looks me over careful-like.

"Somebody been loving you with a rock, or had you proved the assertion that familiarity breeds contempt and stroked that danged jassack of yours from the rear? You ought to get a divorce from that pet. Some day he'll kick you so hard that folks will say, 'The poor devil would be a lot better off if the grim reaper would come along and harvest his soul.' "

"I got this through Magpie," says I.

"My ——! He must be a mess, Ike!"

"You don't *sabe*, Dirty. He was responsible but not accountable. Another mind influenced him."

"Somebody told him to do it?"

"Transmigration of thought."

"Did Magpie tell you this, Ike?"

"Doc Milliken explains the principles."

"Well, you —— fool!" snorts Dirty. "A feller busts your head open and a horse doctor explains why, and you kiss everybody. Well, well! This being the time of the year that a snake sheds its skin and become so obstreperous that it strikes at everything, let's me and you inoculate ourselves against such freaks of nature. A stitch in time is worth a pound of beans in the hand."

"Dirty, you'd intoxicate any snake that would be brave enough to strike you. You're already inoculated against everything."

Dirty lifts out his old Colt, spins the cylinder and rings the bell on the Mint Hall three times in a row, and grins:

"Not yet, Ike. Wait till I miss one out of three."

Inside Buck's place we finds "Mighty" Jones standing on the rail and orating aloud. He's saying:

"Not by a —— sight! Don't believe in it. I'm strong for a Vigilance Committee and I'll help lynch anybody, but I won't be part and parcel to no danged secret nor underground society."

"I'll join the Vigilantes," says Dirty. "I'm against everything but hanging. What's the oration all about, Mighty?"

"Mighty is anti everything," says Buck. "He's one of them mavericks who is wishful to heave a monkey-wrench into the machinery of progress. Ain't it a fact, Magpie?"

We turns and gazes upon Magpie, leaning against the doorway.

"I'd say you wasn't missing the mark much," admits Magpie, "but Mighty ain't alone. Seems to me there is lots of others who sort of backfire on anything pertaining to progress."

"Meaning me, I suppose," says I. "That's why you leans a heavy pitcher upon my brow and never even looks to see if I'm dead or not."

"The dead don't splinter a man's door with lead, Ike," says he.

"You proved—howdy, judge."

"Tol'able," admits Judge Steele, coming in. "How goes the fraternity?"

"Great," admits Magpie. "I've took it all and I'm ordained to pass it on. Just finished in time, too, 'cause that rat-headed hoochhound, over there—"meaning me—"bent his gun over the dome of the Exalted, Most Generous High and Mighty Ruler of the Universe, and it sort of slowed things up.

"Then the danged fool shot three times through the door and the Exalted person removed one of my window frames as he went out. But I got all the dope."

"Charter?" asked the judge.

"Betcha. Everything is hunkydory, judge."

" 'Tis a day of thanksgiving," says the judge pious-like. "I will propose that we rise and drink a toast to the Piperock branch of the Loyal Legion of Lizards. Gents, take off your hats and stand uncovered before Mister Simpkins, the Grand—uh—what is it all, Magpie?"

"Unlimited, Imperial, Unrestrained, Perfect, Exalted, Grand——"

"Whoa!" yelps Dirty Shirt, cocking his gun. "Stop that, Magpie! You can't talk that way and——"

"You're drunk, Dirty," says Magpie disgusted-like.

Dirty blinks his eyes and rocks on his heels. Then he steps outside, shoots three times at the bell and misses all three. Then he steps to the door and bows.

"Gents, I apologize—I'm drunk."

I'M SITTING down on the sidewalk, thinking over the sins of mankind, when all to once comes an awful crash in Buck's place and Mighty Jones skids out on his shoulders. He turns around, drapes his feet over the edge of the sidewalk and feels of his neck.

"Stumble coming out?" I asks.

"Ike, did you ever hear the story about the feller who draped himself over a bar and says out loud, 'I can lick any man in the house.' Nobody said anything, so he says, 'I can lick any man in the town.' Everything is peaceful, so he gets brave and says, 'I can lick any man in the county.' But that don't get results. Then he gets awful humpy and says, 'I can lick any man in the State!' He gets busted wide open by a little feller. When he gets normal he says, 'I covered too much territory.' "

"What did you say, Mighty?" I asks.

"Me? Huh! I said I never seen the lodge I couldn't lick."

Then cometh "Hassayampa" Harris from Curlew. He sets down with us and Mighty opens up on him like this:

"Hassayampa, secret societies are the bane of existence. 'Cause why? When you becomes a member of a society you forgets your duty to mankind. Supposing a horse-thief joins? They're eligible, as long as they're all right morally. Then he steals a horse. Is a brother member going to squeal on him? No, sir! Hoss-stealing becomes a cinch under them conditions and it ain't long before each and every one of that society are rustlers."

"Which is logic, but not explanatory," admits Hassayampa. "Who brings us the society idea, Mighty?"

"I does," says Magpie, who has come up behind us. "I am knowed officially as the Unlimited, Imperial, Unrestrained, Perfect, Grand Protector of the Temple of Piperock."

"My ——!" gasps Hassayampa. "You are? Well, you're about all you can ever expect to

be in this life, Magpie. What temple are you supposed to protect?"

"The Imperial Temple of the Loyal Legion of Lizards."

Hassayampa opens his mouth to say something and then fusses in his pocket until he finds a piece of paper. He looks at us and then reads:

"Beans, flour, hominy, prunes, bacon and dried apples. Thank gosh, I'm still sane enough to read my supply list. So-long."

Hassayampa crosses the street. I says to Magpie—

"What did that title cost you, Unlimited?"

"The complete instructions, et cettery, cost me one hundred dollars."

"How do yuh reckon you're going to get even?"

"Even! Say, Ike, it's the biggest proposition you ever seen. Come on down to the cabin and I'll explain. I figure you in on this, old-timer, and I excuse you for making me hit you with that pitcher."

"You're welcome, but don't figure me, Magpie. I'll go down to the cabin and move out my other overalls and boots. I'm all through, finished and done. *Sabe?*"

"Not after you sees into the scheme, Ike. She's a mint."

"Scenery" Sims is there at the cabin and him and Magpie goes through them motions with their fingers.

"What's his title?" I asks.

"Scenery is the Grand Imperial Chancellor of the Temple."

"Any more titled snake-hunters around here?"

"We're the only two," squeaks Scenery. "We're om-nippy-tent, ain't we, Magpie?"

"Yea. We are the forerunners of a great enterprise, Scenery."

"You're a pair of half-witted woodchucks," says I, hunting for my extra pair of boots. "What is the big idea?"

"Never mind them old boots," says Magpie. "Set down here at the table and let me explain it to you. Now, Ike, I asks you to tell me how many Piperockers has shuffled off this mortal coil in the last two years."

"Why ask me about death?" I asks.

"None," squeaks Scenery like he'd discovered a new island.

"Some danged close calls," says I.

"Close don't count in nothing but pitching horse-shoes," says Magpie. "Here is the idea: The Loyal Legion of Lizards is what is knowed as a benevolent order. It means life insurance, Ike. Me and Scenery has figured it all out. We paid a hundred dollars for the charter and business, and the benevolent part is all our own doings. I got the blanks printed at Silver Bend.

"A feller comes to us and says, 'I am wishful to become a Lizard.' He gets examined by Doc Milliken, who looks him over for symptoms of spavin, et cettery, and if he passes we initiates him into the order.

"Then he pays us five dollars a month and we agrees to pay him, at the time of his demise, five hundred dollars in a lump. We has plans to give Thatcher's orchestra a membership free, which don't insure them, and also a free membership to the Cross J quartet. By so doing we has our music furnished free, and we sure has a quartet which can sing at funerals."

"Not at mine," says I. "I want a quiet funeral, without no casualties but me."

"Ain't she some scheme, Ike?" asks Magpie. "Suppose we gets a hundred men to join. That's five hundred a month, ain't it? Ain't that six thousand per year?"

"Where do I come in, Magpie?" I asks.

"You've got three hundred in the bank, ain't you? We'll give you a title and let you in on a third interest. *Sabe?*"

"Not with my money, Magpie! Not a chance in the world. That little old grubstake stays right there. *Sabe?* You're got a siren's voice, but this time my ears are full of alkali dust. My *manitou* says for me to hang on to what I've got, and my medicine is good. This is one time that Ike Harper don't assay a trace of affection for your nice little scheme."

Magpie gets up and leans across the table.

"Ike, do you mean to set there and tell me that you refuse riches?

"Ain't you got foresight enough to see yourself setting on a plush chair while the money rolls in? Think, you —— fool! Me and you has been pardners in misery so long that I'd almost go down on my knees and beg you to come in with us, but I won't do it, Ike. Nope. No, I won't go down on my knees to you, you ossified hoot-owl. Do you know what I am going to do, Ike?"

"Yes," says I, "I know. What is my position in the scheme?"

"Now, that's talking sense, Ike. You'll be engaged in going out among 'em, and talking 'em into the fold. You will describe the beauties of the Legion until they begs to be let in."

"In plain United States, I pays three hundred for a pedler's license, eh? How many members has you got already?"

"None. The field is virgin, brother. We'll open for business in the Mint Hall tonight; so go ye out and gather them in."

"Is anybody barred?"

"Not to begin with. We may find flaws in their title later on."

"You've wished wealth upon yourself," squeaks Scenery.

"Yeah, that may be," says I, "but I won't live to enjoy it."

"Write yourself a policy," advises Scenery, but I slammed the door and went towards town. I ain't been in Piperock for two months,

but she ain't changed none. I thinks over my three hundred dollars, and looks at the bunch of application blanks in my hand. I figures that a life-insurance agent in Piperock has got about much chance as a jassack has in the Suburban Handicap.

PIPEROCK looks as peaceful as a dove. In fact, she looks too peaceful. She looked natural when I was there a few hours before, but right now she's unnatural. In the middle of the street lays a stiff-brim Stetson hat, and it spins and rolls in the wind like a roulette wheel on a busted spindle.

Comes the snap of a gun and the hat hops high and lights flat on the brim, like it defied anybody to move it again. From the entrance of the Mint Hall comes the wailing yell:

"You hit that hat again and I'll massacree yuh! I resign! Dang it, I tell yuh I resign!"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Three bullets cuts splinters out of Buck's door.

Bang! Bang!

I sees the splinters fly from Pete Gonyer's blacksmith-shop door.

Bang! Bang!

I hears a couple of bullets spin off the sidewalk down by Ricky Henderson's barber-shop. I figures it's about time for me to find an ambush; so I kicks Wick Smith's store door open and falls inside. A couple of bullets whisper to me as I go in, but I don't reply, 'cause I don't know what to say.

Wick is in there, stuffing shells into his pockets, and he tosses me a new box of .44's. I sets down behind a keg of nails.

"What seems to be the argument?" I asks.

"Council meeting."

"Injuns?"

"Naw! Injuns got sense. If you see 'Tombstone' Todd, 'Ornery' Olsen or 'Half-Mile' Smith —kill'm, Ike."

"You sure are filled with sweet thoughts, Wick," says I. "Tell me what council you're talking about."

Wick stops stuffing shells into a rifle and stares at me.

"You been away, ain't you, Ike? Thought so. Piperock is incorporated.

"Yes, sir. Got a mayor, aldermen, et cettery. I'm the mayor."

"Oh! That's the reason everybody is trying to kill everybody else, eh? Political battle?"

"Naw! I makes a motion that we puts a city tax on horse-thieves, cow-rustlers, et cettery, and them three *hombres* I mentioned got up and squalled at me for trying to put the population out of business. I signed the ordinance, proclaimed it as passed and then fell out of the second-story window. I went there without a gun, like a danged fool.

"Mighty Jones gets up and states that he is in favor of getting us a judge who is more addicted to justice than to cactus juice. Judge Steele hammers Mighty on the head with his cane, the same of which makes Mighty act childish with his gun. He misses the judge and hits Pete Gonyer in the watch. Uh-huh. It ruins Pete's Swiss timepiece, and his anger rises. Pete and the judge are over in Pete's shop, shooting at Mighty, who is under the sidewalk in front of Ricky's place.

" 'Old Testament' Tilton asks that we pass an ordinance making it a felony to sell liquor in the city limits, and now he's up in Sam Holt's hay-mow, while Buck sets down below with a shotgun waiting for Testament to change his mind."

"Who is up in the Mint Stairway?"

"I don't know, Ike, but it's likely 'Doughgod' Smith, the marshal. Every time somebody shoots at him he resigns. He's resigned eight times since I jumped out of the window. Now, Ike, who are you for?"

"Me," says I, "I'm going to sell 'em life insurance, Wick."

"For why is that?" asks Wick interested-like.

"Protection. Costs you five per month while you live, and when you die you get five hundred."

"After I'm dead? That's a —— of a lot of good, after I'm dead."

"The city won't have to bury you, Wick."

"I could pack dynamite in my pocket and get the same results, Ike."

He shoots a few times at Buck's place, takes a fresh chew and loads up.

"Nossir, I don't need protection—but them three does. I sure am going to blow out their candles."

"Good!" says I. "Here's a idea; why not take out insurance for all three of them and cash in fifteen hundred to the good? You can bury them for five dollars per head, and that leaves you fourteen hundred and seventy to the good."

Wick chaws industrious for a while and then:

"Five dollars ought to bury the three, Ike. Can I take 'em out like you say?"

"I ain't plumb conversant with the details, Wick, but I reckon you can."

"Write 'em out. Them snake-hunters ain't going to live no month, but you can keep the difference:"

I ducked bullets to get enough light to write 'em out, and Wick signed all three. Then I sneaked out a back window and around behind Ricky's shop. Some lead is still seeping around so I rolls a smoke and took it easy. After while I says, fairly loud:

"Mighty Jones! This is Ike speaking."

"Bring me some .44's, Ike," comes a muffled voice. "Help out a good cause. Play snake or lose your head."

I manages to angle under the sidewalk and give him the shells.

"Mighty, who'd bury you if you got killed?" I asks.

He fills his gun thoughtful-like.

"Never gave it a thought, Ike. Friends, I reckon."

"Friends in life may renege in death."

"You sure touches me deep-like, Ike."

"Sure. Maybe they just dig a hole, throw you in and say, 'Here goes nothing,' or they might put you in a pauper's grave."

"What is a pauper, Ike?"

I made a guess and says—

"A retired sheepherder."

Mighty picks some splinters out of his whiskers and send a few shots at the shop door.

"That's awful, Ike. Ain't there no way to dodge it?"

"In my hand I has the antidote. Sign on the dotted line. You pay us five dollars a month and we guarantee five hundred when you die."

"When—I—die? Shucks, I ain't going to die, and besides that money don't cheer me none if I do. You better go over and insure that danged judge and blacksmith, Ike."

"Why don't you do it? Kill 'em off and collect the thousand."

Mighty stares at me and nods.

"I'll do it. Can you change a twenty? Now, keep down when you get out, 'cause I want a witness left to prove it was all legal. *Sabe?*"

I manages to get behind the shop, where I tells Dirty he'd be safe, but he contends that he's in better shape to shoot where he is. I peers around at the street but she don't look safe. I've got to get across; so I signs my name to an application, pins a five-dollar bill to same, tightens my belt and hit that street at a mile-a-minute clip. Uh-huh, I got across.

A bullet cut the sack of tobacco out of my hip pocket and another turned my hat around on my head, but I'd 'a' got across in fine shape if I hadn't been running regardless and forgot the hitchrack.

I MUST 'a' been looking back when I hit that rail. I feels a awful pain in my chest and my feet begins to whirl over my head. I reckon I went over twice before I fell loose, and then I walked right into a loose buggy-wheel, which almost spoiled all the future I ever looked forward to.

A loose wheel is peculiar. It never does things according to rule and has a awful way of acting when you step into it. Me and that wheel kept company for quite a while. At times it seemed to want to travel and then again it wanted to lay down on me. It ends up by running across my neck and pulling one of my boots off at the same time.

As a protection to the coming generation I hung the darn thing over a post, and it fell down before I got away, and landed on my feet. Then I got mad, kicked it in the hub with my right knee-cap and went away with the feeling that five dollars per month was very little to pay for a decent burial.

I crawled up to the back door of Buck's place, knocked and fell flat to let the bullets pass unhampered.

"This is Ike Harper!" I yells.

"Come in," says Tombstone. "Crawl under the pool table with the rest of us and let Wick waste his lead."

Tombstone and Half-Mile are on the floor, but Ornery is laying on top of a pile of boxes near the roof, where he can shoot into the tops of Wick's windows. Every little while a bullet seeps in and travels around a while.

"Who you gunning for, Ike?" asks Tombstone.

"Business. Who's going to bury you *hombres* when you die?"

Ornery almost falls off his perch.

"When we die?" asks Half-Mile, fussing with a stuck shell. "Seems to me you're taking a lot for granted. Who says we're going to die?"

"Wick Smith predicts it."

"Wick Smith!" yelps Ornery, sitting up. "That penurious——"

Crash!

The pile of boxes buckles in the middle and Ornery hits the floor on his back. Then he gets up and walks circles like a tired pup, and then sets down on the floor.

"What seemed to occur?" asks Tombstone.

Ornery feels of the top of his head and begins singing soft and low:

"Beat the drum slowly and play the fife lowly; beat the dead march as you bear me along. Take me-e-e-e-e out to the prairie-e-e-e-e and lay the sod o'er me-e-e-e-e, for I'm a po-o-o-o-o-o-r cowboy and I know I've done wr-r-r-r-r-r-ong."

"You sure did," nods Half-Mile, "when you raised up."

"Knocked senseless," says Tombstone.

"No, sir," objects Half-Mile. "He was born thataway. He just couldn't stand the rattle when the bullet hit his head."

"A inch higher and the city would have had to bury him," says I.

"We're all thataway, I reckon," grins Tombstone.

"Which is the reason I am here," says I. "I am prepared to guarantee you five hundred dollars when you die, gents, and it only costs you the measly sum of five dollars per each. Prepare for death."

"Hurrah for ——! Who's afraid of fire?" mumbles Ornery.

"Not me," says Tombstone. "A five in the hand is worth a million when I'm dead. Somebody'd take that five hundred and drink it up, and I'd be lucky to get planted in a hole.

Anyway, we're here to kill—not to get killed."

"Then consider Wick. Right now he ain't worth a cent dead. You'd all be called upon to help bury him. Suppose his demise would pay you each five hundred dollars?"

"I—I'll kuk-kill him for a dollar-eighty," mutters Ornery, "and——"

"Shut up!" snaps Tombstone. "What's the idea, Ike?"

I outlines it to them, and they give me three cheers.

"If we don't kill him this month can we ante again next month?" asks Half-Mile.

"Just as long as it takes you," says I, and tucks the fifteen into my pocket.

I uses oratory to get an audience with the judge and Pete. I stands at the corner of the building and discourses thusly:

"Gents, I am neutral. I ain't mad at nobody and my mission is peace on earth and something to bury you with when you die. Can I come in?"

"It's the voice of Ike Harper but the argument of a undertaker," says Pete. "Come on in, you danged old pelican."

I got the anvil between me and Mighty Jones and fills out two more applications.

"Five dollars!" yawps Pete. "Five hundred dollars when I die? Haw! Haw! Haw! Mighty Jones couldn't hit a flock of passenger trains. Me and the judge has just about got his location figured out and I'll bet we shuffle him off inside of another box of shells."

"Yes, and what good will his corpse be to you? Revenge is sweet, but wouldn't it be sweeter if you could each collect five hundred dollars on his re-mains?"

"My ——!" snorts the judge. "Is there a bounty on him?"

Say, I explained it to them, and I has a hard time getting away. They each wanted to take out two against poor Mighty.

"Do we bring in the whole carcass or just the ears, like they do with coyotes?" asks Pete.

"Better keep all of him until we figures out some system."

Old Testament was harder to get at. I sneaks to the back of the stable, leans a peeled pole up to the hay window and starts climbing. I figures to see him before I see Buck. It ain't over thirty feet up that pole, but she's a long ways when you're expecting to be assaulted front and rear any minute. I gets one knee over the edge of the window when down on my head comes a fork-handle and I falls inside just in time to get the drag of both barrels of a shotgun from the rear.

I feels that I'm plumb ragged of rear, but the ringing in my ears makes me forget the pain. I seems to hear Buck's voice saying—

"I'll teach you to promote a drouth!"

Then I hears Testament say pious-like:

"In the midst of life we are in death."

"It sure had its stinger working this day and date," says I.

Testament has got his head and arms out of the hay and is holding a busted fork-handle.

"The wicked shall perish," says Testament.

"And the innocent shall suffer," says I, feeling myself.

"I am prepared to die for my convictions," says he.

"How are you fixed for a funeral?" I asks. "Got plenty left to plant your remains?"

"I may not die. I shall go softly and pray that this fork-handle faileth me not."

"And just about bust Buck's head wide open, eh?"

"Yea."

"And let the city bury him, Testament. Ever ponder on that? It's all right to kill a man, but a killer ought to bury his dead. Now, here is the idea: You pay us five dollars per month as long as Buck lives and when he dies we'll give you five hundred dollars. That will give him a decent funeral."

"It won't take that much, Ike."

"You preach the sermon and keep the balance."

I WAS afraid to slide down that pole. I looks the place over for possibilities—and found one. I decided to tread lightly to the front and peek down at Buck, but in treading lightly over the hay I treaded over a hay-hole, but not lightly enough to keep from going hence.

I grabbed both hands full of hay and then cometh flashing lights, the crashing of thunder and the smell of powder smoke. After while I seems to be coming from under the anesthetic and I shake all over. After while I finds out why I shake.

I'm setting on Buck's back and he's acting restless. There's an old shotgun sticking out of a manger and I feel that it must have went awful high to get there.

I takes out an application, writes Old Testament's name on it and then rolls Buck over and props him against the manger.

"Did—did anybody gug-get out alive?" he wheezes.

"None," says I, wrapping his fingers around a pencil. "Sign your name on the dotted line and give me five dollars. I'm taking up a collection for the victims."

I gets the money, and wraps it with the application.

"You and Testament are about fifty-fifty," says I. "He busted his fork-handle on my head."

"I'm gug-glad that the little birds didn't get hurt," says he. "Can't you hear 'em sing?"

I tore up my application on the way home. Magpie and Scenery are doing a lot of figuring but they stop when I comes in.

"Did they swamp you with applications?" asks Magpie.

"I done very well," says I, and then I says to Scenery, "What kind of a sheriff are you to set here and let the city battle each other?"

"Is there discord up there?"

"Wild and free."

"None of my business," says Scenery. "I'm the sheriff of the county. They've got a marshal, ain't they?"

"Did have, but he's resigned twenty-seven times today."

"He ain't got no guts," says Magpie.

"Well, maybe he ain't," says I, "but if he has he's taking good care of them."

Magpie digs into that bunch of applications and his eyes get plumb wild. He slides his feet off the table and stares at me.

"Tell me about this discord up-town, Ike."

I explains the whole thing to him and Scenery and they listens without interrupting me once.

"Selling insurance is a cinch," says I.

"Yes," nods Magpie slow-like, "it must 'a' been. You collected sixty dollars, Ike. The whole sum of sixty dollars, and you imperiled us to the amount of six thousand dollars!"

"What say?" squeaks Scenery.

"Likely put us six thousand dollars in the hole. What was you thinking of, Ike?"

"Death—exclusively. I'm getting ghoulish as ——!"

"Maybe they won't all die," squeaks Scenery. "Maybe only half."

"Three thousand!" groans Magpie.

"Say, how much money has the Legion got?" I asks.

"Three hundred, Ike—not counting this sixty."

"Three hundred!" I gasps. "I put in three hundred——"

"Uh-huh," nods Magpie. "That's it."

I looks at them and they seem to be looking at me more in sorrow than in anger. I hears Magpie say—

"It is monstrous."

I says—

"Lizardly speaking, it is Gila monstrous."

Then Scenery cackles and I went loco. I hate to hear men cackle, especially when they cackle in E-string voices. It sort of sends a message to my trigger finger and I seems to lose sight of the tender things of life. I never was a wizard on pulling a gun. I sets by and watches other fellers practise the swift draw and most of them are gone hence, but there comes a time in every man's life when he forgets that he's leisurely with a gun. I forgot.

It was all done fairly quick. I got my hand as far as the butt of that gun and then something seems to explode in my head. When my nervous system gets back to the straight and narrow way, I'm on the floor and beside me with the handle busted off is that danged heavy sirup pitcher. I've got a pinnacle swelled up over my right eye which matches the one over the left, and my ears are full of molasses.

I staggered over to the door, but she's locked on the outside. On the door is a notice which reads:

HAVE WENT TO SAVE THE LEGION.
STAY WHERE YOU ARE—AND PRAY.

"For the soul of the man who hit me twice in the same day with a sirup pitcher," says I.

After while somebody unbolts the door and Doughgod Smith sticks his head inside.

"You sure look like a changed man, Ike," says he, peering at me. "You look meek and mild."

"My looks are liars, 'cause I'm feeling like a killer, Doughgod."

"Different here. I've been shot at until I can't walk slow. I want to resign, but nobody will stand still long enough to accept it."

"You need a deputy."

"Aw-w-w-w, I don't need help! I need relief. I'd kiss any man who would take this job off my hands."

"I'll take the job, Doughgod, but not the kiss," says I.

"Hold up your right hand and be swore!" he gasps.

"Give me that star! What's an oath between friends?"

"You've got to admit to the 'So help you Gawd,' Ike."

"I'll admit that much, but I'm going to place a lot of confidence in my old .44."

I got the star and went towards town. It's getting dark but I'm aiming to get close before I shoot. I finds Dirty Shirt setting in front of Buck's place, which is dark. The Mint Hall seems to be the only lighted place in town.

"I came back for medical advice, but I can't find the horse-doctor," says Dirty. "I never missed that bell three times in a row before."

"Come and help me kill Scenery Sims and Magpie," says I. "I'm sure going to assassinate them two, Dirty."

"All right, Ike. I ain't heard such good news since Dewey whipped the Italians at Rhode Island."

Bill Thatcher tried to stop us at the door.

"What is the password?" he asks.

I jams my .44 under his chin, and he wilts.

"Pass in, friends," says he.

THEN we gets a view of the interior and I forgets that I came to kill. Magpie and Scenery are setting on the platform, each of them with a sawed-off shotgun across their laps. Them blood-hunters are setting around the place as far apart as they can get.

Bill Thatcher, Al Thatcher and "Frenchy"

Deschamps, the jew's-harp virtuoso, are grouped in front of the platform with their discord utensils, and behind them sets "Telescope" Tolliver, "Muley" Bowles, "Chuck" Warner and Henry Peck, the Cross J quartet. Tied to a bench at the rear of the room is one of Mighty Jones' goats. Me and Dirty takes seats as far as possible from that goat, 'cause we know it's a cross between a pile-driver and a grizzly bear.

Just then the door of the anteroom opens and Doc Milliken comes out with his sleeves rolled up.

Magpie stands up, cocks both barrels of his annihilator and says:

"Feller Lizards to be—maybe. As I has said to you before, your application is null and void until you has passed medically. Our hired representative erred when he said that all we required was your names, and I wishes to compliment you on your sensibilities on quitting your private feuds until same was settled.

"The eminent doctor is prepared to make mi-nute investigations of your nervous systems and report in detail to us. He may or not pass you as being whole."

"I rises to ask a question," says Buck. "As soon as he notifies us that a victim has passed, do we have a right to shoot and collect the damages?"

"This ain't no den of murderers," squeaks Scenery. "You'll get an even break, Buck."

Magpie, Scenery and Doc whispers a while, and then Magpie gets up.

"Gents, we're going to give everybody a square deal. The candidates will be examined as their names are called. After everybody is examined, Doc Milliken will hand me a written list of them what has passed. I will nail the list to the wall, that ye may all read your fate. Testament Tilton is the first lucky man."

That bunch of belligerents sets there and waits for him to come out. Magpie wraps two fingers around the triggers and studies each one intently.

"Might sing a little song," offers Muley. "I wrote one for the occasion. What do you think?"

"Take a chance," squeaks Scenery. "I love music."

"I moves that they stand up to sing," says Half-Mile. "I don't want to make any mistake when I starts shooting."

They stood up and sang one verse. It went like this!

"We-e-e love our little Le-e-e-e-jun
Like a Siwash loves his li-i-i-i-cker.
Will we all hang to-o-o-o-o-gether?
Well, I would sort of spi-i-i i i-cker.
We'll rise and fall to-o-o-o-o-o-gether
N-o-o-o matter what comes u-u-u-u-up,
We'll stick right to our Le-e-e-e-e-jun
Like ticks upon a pu-u-u-u-u-u-u-p."

Old Testament comes walking out and sets down.

"You old psalm-singer!" hisses Buck. "I wish I knowed."

"Buck Masterson is next," announces Magpie.

"Thank gosh!" grunts Buck. "I won't have to hear no more of that song."

"Shall we keep on singing?" asks Muley.

"Not to amuse me," says Magpie. "I reckon that song is musically inclined, but I don't like to hear four grown men hold their breath like that. Maybe you better rest a while. Maybe the orchestra would like to play."

"Music hath charms to soothe the savage beast," says Bill Thatcher, rosining his old bow.

"Not your music," says Half-Mile. "It makes me mad. I hate —— out of Sweet Marie, especially when she's played by main strength. You'd seem a heap like Ole Bull to a deaf man whose eyesight was failing."

Buck came out and Ornery Olsen went in. Pretty soon Dirty Shirt stands up and says—

"Magpie, does them fellers have to pay Doc for his opinion?"

"Nope. They pay the five dollars and get examined free."

"I need looking over," opines Dirty, "so you can fill me out one of them application things."

Magpie fixes him up and he was the last one to go inside. The rest of them just sets there and glares at each other. Magpie comes down and has a little talk with the quartet and then they gets up and starts out.

"Why for does the canaries leave?" asks Half-Mile, and Muley says:

"This here bunch of golden-voiced warblers are going to leave before the list is posted. *Sabe?* We came to praise Cæsar—not to bury him."

Then Dirty came out and sat down beside me. Magpie and Scenery cocks their guns and hooks their toes around the legs of their chairs. Doc Milliken tiptoes up to Magpie and hands him the list.

Guns seem to appear from every waistband, and I seen Ole Testament spit on his hands and pick up his fork-handle. As Magpie stands up I hears several guns click.

"Gents," says Magpie, "we're going to give you all an even break. All of you get up and walk to the back of the room. Then you form a line, like you was going to run a race; *sabe?* I am going to tack this list against the wall up here, and when I give the word you can all walk—walk, not run—up to where you can read your fate. Me and Scenery are going to stand here, and the first man who hurries, shoves, trips or otherwise hampers his neighbor will spend eternity picking buckshot out of his earthly envelope. Now, line up—dang yuh, line up!"

They followed directions to the letter while Magpie nails that fatal sheet to the wall.

"Go!" says Magpie, and they went, while the orchestra played, soft and low, "What Shall the Harvest Be?"

Somebody cusses soft-like, and I hears Magpie say—

"Easy, Tombstone!" They seems to all stop together and their heads are at least three feet ahead of their boots.

I seen Half-Mile's hand relax from his gun and it fell on the floor. Old Testament tried to pick his teeth with the fork-handle. Tombstone hitches up his belt and scratches one knee with his other foot.

"According to that, we're candidates for the cemetery," observed Judge Steele sickly-like.

"Who passed?" whispered Ornery, who can't read.

"Dirty Shirt Jones!" yelped Half-Mile.

"Where is Doc Milliken?" howled Buck, but Doc had gone hence.

They just sort of mills around and looks at each other.

"Well," says the judge, "what will we do now?"

"You might kiss and make up," suggests Magpie. "Piperock is getting as bad as New York. You fellers won't kill nobody unless you gets paid for it."

"Am I a Lizard or ain't I?" asks Dirty Shirt.

"You ain't been initiated yet," squeaks Scenery.

"Whatfor kind of a thing is that?"

"We'll show yuh," grins Magpie. "It's lots of fun. We ain't got all our things to do with yet, but we *sabe* a few simple things."

Magpie and Scenery gets Bill Thatcher and Frenchy to help them, and the rest of us sets back to see the fun. They takes off his boots and puts a can of Cayenne pepper in each one. Then they waltzes him up and down the hall until it gets to working good. I feel sorry for poor old Dirty. He gets past with that, and then Scenery announces that he is about to be presented with the Royal Girdle of the Crippled Crawlers, and he hands Dirty a live bull snake.

Poor Dirty lets out a war-whoop and tries to get loose, but the four of them hang on to him. The poor feller is blindfolded so he can't see nothing and he don't know it wasn't a rattler. Then they picks him up off the floor by the arms and legs.

"Brother Lizards," says Magpie, "we will now cast him into outer darkness, that he may obtain meekness and learn to crawl."

Dirty yelps and tries to get loose, but they raises the window, Magpie yells, "Tim-m-m-mber-r-r-r-r!" and they threw him out bodily.

"My Gawd!" gasps Tombstone. "You've killed the poor coot!"

Magpie turns from the window and grins at the crowd.

"That was a danged inhuman thing to do," states Half-Mile. "It's thirty feet to the street."

Just then we hears somebody yell: "Whoo, hoo! Magpie!"

Magpie opens another window and leans out. Muley Bowles yells up.

"Hurry up! We can't wait all night."

"My ——!" gasps Magpie. "They had the blanket at the wrong window!"

Then I cut the rope off the goat's neck.

Mighty saw it first. He knew what he knew when he yelled—

"Look out for John L. Goat!"

Man, they looked out. That goat was all primed to do the duties he was supposed to do in a lodge, but the floor was slippery and most of them got past. John L. Goat skidded and blatted and hit Tombstome Todd as he dove for the door, and Tombstone went into the wall against the side of his head, and I saw all the ambition die out of his eyes.

The goat hit him once after he was down, and then went tiptoeing around the hall while I hid behind a chair. It hopped up on the platform, pulled down the notice, picked up a sheet of paper off the table and seemed to make itself a sandwich. Then it came down and went out of the door.

I rolled me a cigaret and pondered deep-like on lodges. Suddenly I hears a scraping noise and into the door comes Dirty Shirt on his hands and knees. He's got an expression on his face like that of an old dog looking for a place to die. He crawls plumb over to the window and I walks beside him, patting him on the head. Once he licked my hand, I think. Still, maybe he tried to bite me—I don't just know.

Over by the window he hauls himself up and peers outside. The bunch are lighting the lamps in Buck's place.

I put my arm around Dirty to keep him from falling out, and he says—

"I—fell—for—a — mile — and — then — I — bounced."

"Bounced?"

"Don'tcha—believe—me?"

Biff!

I had forgotten that goat. The universe seemed to hit me just below the point of balance. I scraped my knee-caps and felt my toes hang for a second—then space. I hung on to Dirty Shirt. It seems years after the landing before I can breathe, and then I sets up in the road beside Dirty Shirt. I says—

"Did—you—bounce?"

"No," says he weak-like. "I didn't have a chance, 'cause you was on top."

It took us about an hour to get home. Dirty had one leg that wanted to go north and I had one that wanted to go south; so we covered a lot of useless territory on the way. Doc

Milliken and Magpie are in the cabin, and they sure stared at us quite some when we fell inside arm in arm.

"Dirty," says Magpie, "we're sorry. We had men at the window to catch you, but they got at the wrong window when you fell."

"Which—time?" asks Dirty.

"Magpie, is there an insanity clause in that policy?" asks Doc. "This feller is knocked crazy."

"Nope. I returned the money you collected today, Ike."

"Why did Doc pass me and turn down the rest?" wonders Dirty.

"Because you wasn't mad at anybody," grins Doc.

"Don't I get nothing for my trouble?" I asks. "I've sure done a day's work."

"Yes," says Magpie, "and it took a horse-doctor to undo it, Ike."

"Is the Legion still doing business?" asks Dirty.

"In times of peace," says Magpie, "but in these days of paid murder she'd soon put the Bank of England in the sere and yaller leaf. We sure figure on doing big business but——"

The door flies open and Scenery sticks his head inside.

"All is lost," he squeaks. "Th-the gug-goat ate the ch-charter!"

Which finished Magpie's sentence and the Loyal Legion of Lizards.

Toyama

A Five-Part Story

Part III by

Patrick Casey

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

I, CHET OVERMAN, saw it myself—the treasure chest which we had dug up on the shore of Magdelena Bay—filled to overflowing with freshly minted Mexican gold pieces. It was the end of our quest; that quest which had sent us out from San Francisco on the bare word of Adolfo Ramerez de Valencia, alias Serafin Dicenta, an absconding paymaster of the Mexican army, who swore he had buried his loot here before he was arrested.

Dicenta had vanished and the bail we had put up for him was forfeit; but here was enough gold to satisfy all our claims, and there were only four of us to share it: Kit Morley, the reporter who had gained the Mexican's confidence; his wife; Jim Hathaway, captain of the *73*, a converted submarine chaser which had brought us there; and myself.

Jim and I wished that Mrs. Morley had not come, for we distrusted her. Now as we stood staring down on the wealth before us, I knew that already she coveted it all for her husband. Yet when she ordered me back to the ship to get Jim and some of the sailors to help move the chest, I went.

There was need for haste. The secret of the buried treasure was shared also by Mariquita, a beautiful Mexican who was the discarded mistress of Dicenta. We believed her to be living inland with the Indians and feared she might attempt to regain the gold at any minute.

A strange sight greeted us after we had the chest safely on board the *73*. A ship sailed into the bay, flying the flag of Japan and laden with Japs, men and women in bright-colored kimonos. We watched them disembark under the leadership of a tall man, whose high hat and somber robe were covered with

figures of mice. Late in the afternoon they tramped away across the desolate, cactus-covered sand dunes.

By signals we learned that the ship was the *Taisai Maru* and that the yellow people were to become cooks and camp-followers of Villa. Jim and I disbelieved this, and our alarm increased when later in the evening we found that the Morleys had deserted us. Through the gathering dusk we saw them boarding the *Taisai*.

We burst open the treasure chest; the gold was still there. A thick fog arose, drifting around us like a gray, impalpable wall. We weighed anchor and tried to escape. Useless. Our propellers had become entangled in the thick, lush seaweed of those Southern waters.

A moment later we were boarded by the Jap crew, whose naked yellow bodies had been greased with oil. At the first attack Jim fell wounded. Again and again I emptied my revolver into that writhing mass.

The struggle was too unequal. Our crew were beaten and I, with a knife-hash in my leg, was forced back against the rail. It gave under my weight and I found myself swimming desperately toward shore, through shark-infested waters. Once on land I made haste to put a safe distance between the treacherous Morleys and myself.

Suddenly from out of the darkness I heard a strange cry—

"Gov'ment agent."

An instant later a Japanese, one of the advance guard, hurled himself at me. As I crouched low he catapulted over me. Flinging myself on his back, I beat his face into the stony ground until he lay motionless.

Again I fled and again I heard that weird cry. A figure arose by my side. It was the Mouse-Man himself. He offered me no violence but in broken English tried to persuade me to return to the ship. I protested that I was not an agent of any government and meant his people no harm.

As I talked an odd thing happened. Believe me or not as you will; one of the mice embroidered on his robe moved! It crawled slowly up his sleeve and disappeared. As I stared he said again—

"You must return to your ship, please."

As we walked forward, the Japanese, whom I had knocked senseless, hurried up to us, his forehead still bloody.

Quickly in his own tongue he whispered to the Mouse-Man. I was able to understand only that he was telling of the raid on our ship. Much disturbed, the priest hurried toward the shore, leaving me with the man I had recently struck down.

We marched on through the night. A knife held at my back warned me that escape was futile.

Suddenly we heard a sound from a near-by thicket and I thought I saw a moving figure. Without a word my captor dashed forward and disappeared in the shade. A moment later I heard a cry, piercing and terrible. Running toward it in a panic, I stumbled over the Japanese, sprawled out dead, with an Indian knife in his breast. A moment later a crushing blow descended on my head. When I recovered consciousness I found myself in an Indian camp, among the followers of Mariquita. She herself bound up my wounds and assured me that I had no cause for fear. The Indians desired only to know the meaning of the sign of the mouse, which they had worshiped from prehistoric times, and to hear whether the Japanese meant them harm.

As we talked I felt my suspicions of the beautiful girl slipping away, and could not believe the evil I had heard of her. My distress was great therefore when later she rushed in with flaming eyes, and in a passion-choked voice cried that I had betrayed them to the Japanese, who were marching toward their village under the leadership of Morley, who, she insisted, was no other than Serafin Dicenta!

CHAPTER XIX

THE WOMAN SCORNED

THE recollection of the swift events which followed is rather jumbled in my mind. On the back of Mariquita's passion-accentuated words came such a whirl of agitation and action that I should experience no little difficulty in attempting to relate its exact sequence.

There was a vibrant shouting from the priest beside me, an eery keening from the women listening in the dark huts, a scurrying hither and yon of terra-cotta-hued Indians, a long roll of the drums and a blood-tingling fanfare from the buglers stationed below at the foot of the adobe stairs. A war-party was being formed, I gathered, to attack the intrenching Japanese and their white allies.

Probably it is all so strenuous and mixed in my memory because the while I was in a great pother over the abrupt change in the girl, her obvious disdain of me for some unworthiness she must have detected in my character. I felt it came of that hypothetical return of the Mexican lieutenant, Dicenta, which she no doubt judged I had known all the time and purposely concealed.

I was almost morally certain she had made a sad mistake and from the courier's feverish description had pictured the chubby-faced, chunky traitor Kit Morley as none other than the blond, dapper and beardless *teniente*, Serafin Dicenta.

The appearance of the other woman with the supposed Dicenta had placed Mariquita in the toils of the primal triangle. She was not aware that beyond a shadow's doubt the other woman was Morley's wife. She was the woman cast aside, relegated and scorned. That had inflamed her quick Latin temperament with consuming jealousy and violent hatred, fused her with passion, fiery, feline and ferocious.

I saw her now, without wasting another withering glance upon me, swing the Sable Star sharply about and go galloping up the cow-path toward the chasmy break in the cliffs, the spank of the stallion's hoofs rataplaning through the cañon like musketry fire, her cloud of storm-black hair tossing behind her as if she were some fleet dark nymph on an urgent errand of Diana.

The zebra-striped priest beside me, his snaky

locks tumbling about his painted face, the nostrils of his aquiline nose twitching with excitement, was leaning far over the edge of the *teocalli* and shouting down galvanic commands to the armed men below. A detachment of eight men, including Quetzal, my former guard, broke away from the hollow square and stacking their Mausers by the swivels to one side of the plaza went loping swiftly up the cow-path in the wake of la Caballera del Sol.

With a military snappiness and quietude that spoke of discipline and arduous training, the hollow square formed into double ranks of squads. Other naked bronze men came bounding up armed with Mausers and joined the formation, falling into ordained places without commotion or disorder. Then, numbering fully six-score men, their guns at the carry, the company went running at quick time through the cañon toward the distant fields.

The one-two trot of the men and the weird wailing of the huddled women in the hovels hung in echoes about the windless plaza. There was no one left in that scorched, heat-quivering plaza save Metztli and I up there on the brown adobe platform of the *teocalli*. The baked curls of the priest leaped snakily about his painted face as he swung his eyes upon me. Those black eyes glittered watchfully now as if he were a cat, and I some bird.

"Señor," he said politely enough, "who are these *paisanos* of yours, this white *hombre* and his woman, who have joined hands with the perfidious and audacious yellow men? Is the *hombre* indeed the *teniente*, Dicenta, whom la Caballera del Sol so cordially hates?"

I shook my head.

"No; he is not Dicenta to my knowledge and what's more neither of them are friends of mine. The two are Morley and his wife if I judge correctly, two former members of the crew of our little ship. They have turned traitor to us."

"Ah!" and his arched nostrils suddenly tensed. "They are your enemies! It is well!"

"*Si, si,*" I nodded. "They went over to that ship with the many sails, last night, and persuaded the Japanese to come aboard our craft to get that chest of gold which Mariquita says belongs more to her than to any one else. That was the trouble which drew the saffron priest to the beach, leaving me in the hands of the man who was killed——"

"I'm glad he was killed!" burst out the priest vehemently, his nostrils pulsing like hearts of fire, his black eyes cruel.

"*Chispas!* Would they all were dead! They are infernal lizards for treachery and deceit! They told you, *señor*, they did not intend to remain in this country of the Guiacuras; they told us they would combine forces with us and found together a great new Nahuatlac nation. Lies, all lies! Instead, without apology or by your leave, they have squatted upon the land given to us alone by Quetzalcoatl, the Good.

"This can not be," he went on more calmly. "We Guiacuras have a trust to maintain, a lofty charge to keep, a debt of outrage to repay. *Señor caballero*, we are about to drive into the desert to rid ourselves forever of the irritating neighborhood of these sly tricky ones.

"Will you ride with us? We do not need your aid; we are more than sixscore strong; but you say the white man and woman are no friends of yours. They have played you false. Perhaps you would welcome this opportunity to come along in order to requite your white *paisanos* for their treachery."

"Would I? I should say!" I exclaimed gladly. "And thank you, Metztli old man, for the chance!"

It was indeed my chance to help in the routing of Morley and his wife and their Japanese. Perhaps through it I might be enabled to regain control of the *Seventy-three*, release the loyal crew and Jim Hathaway if he still lived and arrive at some understanding, finally, as to who was entitled to that chest of golden hidalgos and medio-hidalgos in the forward magazine.

OF A sudden the girl Mariquita appeared upon the star-blazed stallion at the head of the cow-path. She came tearing down, her tumult of lustrous black hair once again confined beneath the silver-corded sombrero which she probably had ridden out to recover. She went flying by, drawing up sharply before a mud and stake hut a little below the plaza. Athletically she leaped out of the silver-sparkling saddle and vanished into the dark entry.

From the chasmy break in the chrome cliffs reappeared on the run the detachment of eight men under command of Quetzal. They were incrusted with white clay up to the neck, a white coat that glistened in the stinging rays as if it had been freshly moistened with water. They had probably gone to the pigmented earth of the Collado de Colorado and there by the rim of the pool molded the clay upon their limbs and nude bodies.

Each grabbed his Mauser from the stack in the plaza and separating dispersed into the hovels, to the four quarters of the *teocalli*, from whence the sound of wailing still rose and fell and hung for odd moments on eery notes.

In a hot swirl of dust, the long company of armed bucks, who had trotted away at quick time, thundered into the plaza atop saddleless horses—fine, upstanding creatures of spirit, quality and gleaming coats, black, bay, chestnut, roan and sorrel. The two drummers and several buglers were in the lead, their sleekly shining instruments held under a free hand against their thighs. The blue-steel Mausers of the

others were slung across bronze backs and a squad in the rear were leading animals bare of riders.

They milled about in the papery grass of the plaza, some dismounting and disappearing into the keening huts, to return almost instantly burdened with belts and bandoliers brassy with yellow cartridges, the others poising the hempen reins in one hand and looking up at the priest from beneath shocks of black hair, as if awaiting some signal from him.

The eight clay-coated men came darting out of the various hovels and clustered at the edge of the plaza, their Mausers gone and white hoods shrouding their heads, the ebon eyes behind the narrow slits gleaming like lignite.

From the oily breech-clout of each protruded two haftless knives of obsidian, one over either hip. In their hands were *maquahuitl* or handwoods, clubs barbed with two rows of large sharp obsidian flakes. A well-directed blow from one of those jagged clubs would cleave the backbone of a horse or cut a man in two from shoulder to pelvis.

"*Aupa! Quita de ahi!*" shouted the high priest to them, indicating the riderless horses. "Up and away with you! Leave your animals at the mesquite flat and join Ichcapilli and his scouts. Be able to report, Quetzal, a sound mode of attack. *Vaya!*"

The men of the clay coats, hoods and barbarous clubs, who were to act under Quetzal's leadership as the advance force of reconnaissance, mounted the animals in the rear of the column, leaving one broad-backed, heavy-fetlocked bay still lacking an owner. They beat a devil's tatoo up the cow-path and out the rupture in the chrome walls.

"Here, one of you *macehualli!*" the voice of the priest cracked beside me like a pistol shot. "Ride back to the corral and bring up a stout and fleet animal for this *hombre*, who will ride with us." He indicated me.

A low murmur as of prompt approval arose from the cavalcade. One in the rear swung his horse's head about and went dashing through the pueblo toward the distant fields.

In a swirling ball of dust he shot past Mariquita as she stepped out of her hut, a cartridge belt accentuating the curve of her waist, thick with brass cartridges as a mouth with teeth and sagging over either hip with the weight of two leather-holstered revolvers. She looked after the speeding rider as in surprize and a deal of wonder. Then with reckless haste she spurred into the plaza.

"What is afoot, Metztli, O Reflector of the Sun!" she cried, checking the stallion with a sharp wrench, her eyes sparkling glassily from the priest to me and back again. "For whom is there need of another horse?"

"For this *hombre!*" snapped Metztli with an abrupt and very evident show of spleen. "I have asked him to ride with the Guiacuras and he has readily agreed. He says the white *hombre* and his woman are traitors and enemies of his. Has la Caballera del Sol reason to say me nay?"

There was a challenge in Metztli's question. It was as if, ere starting on this hazardous expedition, he wanted to test once and for all the security of his own authority. My induction into the question was fortuitous and of minor import.

The girl sensed, with Latin perspicacity, the delicacy of the crisis. Expressively she shrugged the soft-rounded shoulders beneath the bolero jacket.

"It is as you say, O Metztli," she capitulated with a fair show of grace. "It is not for me to question the authority and discernment of the Reflection of the Sun. But remember I warn you," she could not refrain from adding. "Just as I had sound reason to doubt these Japanese, just so do I put small trust in this *hombre*. He is as crafty as the yellow priest himself, a very *lagarto* for lies!

"But *y pues!*" she concluded hastily as in swift resentment the brows of the priest knotted over coldly glittering eyes. "I shall tell you about it all on the ride. Now, O Metztli, we have not the time nor the privacy."

A mischievous notion leaped full-fledged and brutally into my brain. I'll admit it hurt, this distrust and contempt of me from her who had once been so considerate and gloriously fine.

"*Señorita,*" I said stressing politeness, leaning over the edge of the *teocalli* and looking brazenly down at the beautiful girl, "I desire to serve in this punitive expedition, but observe, I am unarmed and powerless to aid. I was thinking perhaps you would lend me one of your six-guns."

The black dripping lashes flickered over her eyes as if I were a dust-mote in their light.

"You will come along unarmed," she returned coldly. "And you may deem yourself fortunate indeed, *hombre*, if you are not sent bundling back, once I have discussed your deceit with Metztli."

The lashes widened sharply, the great golden eyes scorching me with menace. Then turning away she swung the stallion into position at the head of the troop.

CHAPTER XX

A PARTY OF WAR

THERE was no flourish of trumpets, no rub-a-dub of drums as we rode out of the box cañon of Siete Fuentes. Only the primitive, eery ulla-lulla of the women left behind, the spanking rat-a-tat of hoof-beats like the incessant, noisy clatter of machine guns, made weird sounds in the torpid afternoon.

Mariquita rode in the van with the brilliantly striped priest Metztli, who had mounted the broad back of the heavy-fetlocked bay. Behind them came I upon the blanketed ridge of a pinto pony, the blanket an afterthought I had had the fearful temerity to insist upon, myself cutting as queer a figure as any in the cavalcade, I'll wager, what with the khaki knee trousers and army shirt, my bare legs and red head and feet shod in rawhide *teguas*. Bringing up the rear were the drummers and buglers and the bucks, two abreast, a long waving column of flashing guns and of skins that gleamed duskily like tawny gold under the perpendicular pelting of the sun.

We wove among the boles of cottonwoods through the chasmy break in the hills, past the Seventh Spring and the colorful Collado de Colorado with its black mouth of tunnel and blinding-sheeted shack, and out upon the broad expanse of mesa, greenly laced with spiky grass and tangles of leguminous creepers and spangled here and there by yellow wild flowers.

We rode at a leisurely though steady canter. The pace was carefully judged, I surmised, to fetch us to the Japanese encampment around dusk. During daylight such an interval of distance would lie between the yellow men and us as to render the cavalcade indistinguishable to the eye among the billows of sand and sage.

Mariquita and Metztli were talking earnestly together. As he nodded to some statement of the girl, the baked curls of the priest leaped and danced like nothing so much as snakes writhing in agony. At times I could glimpse the chiseled profile of the girl turned to him in concern or appeal, the short piquant nose, an olive-fair cheek faintly curving into outline, the patrician penciling of silky lashes and black brows. Always at these times there was strongly the impression of vivid, animated, humidly splendid eyes. I knew they were discussing me.

I felt a certain fear that Mariquita in her bitterness might prevail upon the balbriggan-suited priest to send me back to the cañon, there to await the result of the expedition.

I hoped that the position Metztli had taken at the outset, his assumption of complete authority and apparent jealousy lest one iota of it be jeopardized, would frustrate the girl from winning her acrimonious contention. I wished sincerely she would drop back, if only for a moment, and suffer me to explain.

Meantime however I knew a strange elation over thus riding with the war-party. It was the happy culmination of a most perplexing night. Instead of having to trek on across the sand after the dubious aid of the American ranchers on the northern uplands, I was accomplishing my mission with unlooked-for success, riding back with these swinging, bobbing Indians, over one hundred and twenty strong; bristling with Mausers and belligerently vengeful.

Everything was shaping to my desire. Even what had been an insoluble mystery was a mystery no longer. I knew now the secret of the clutch of superstition Suzunoya-no-Koji had vised about these Guiacuras. True, I had not had the courage to tell the Indians the real meaning of the sun-flag and dormant mouse of the Azteca zodiac; but still I had been instrumental in loosing that superstitious clutch, in opening their eyes to the Oriental deceit and in rousing them to this determined crusade.

Such indeed was my elation and such my respect for the martial skill of these Indians that I could see naught to hinder us from routing Morley and his wife and their Japanese. We would yet regain control of the *Seventy-three* and the gold chest in its magazine, rescue the loyal crew and poor old Jim Hathaway if he still breathed and ship all those yellow coolies helter-skelter out to sea.

THERE being nothing else to do while I awaited Metztli's decision but bob and swing to the canter of the loose-reined pony, I fell to imagining myself relating the whole wild yarn to good old Jim. He at least would believe my tale of the nocturnal walk across the ghostly sand, the unchained thrall to that mouse-nest of a Buddhist *bonze;* the episode of the clay-coated Indians that pursued like hungry coyotes; and my successful session with the sun-worshippers and rather unfortunate one with Mariquita. I even straightened up with a thrill of pride as I pictured myself exposing the solution of the whole mystery.

And then it seemed to me as if Hathaway, looking quizzically through his horn rims from under down-drawn brows, would drawl:

"But what really are these Japanese doing here? Of course that was all fabrication about their making a portage over the hills to join Villa's forces as sappers and cooks, the same, Chet, as the story they told these Indians about joining with them to found a new hybrid nation. But what on earth are they doing building a village in the sand and apparently preparing for a long stay? They must have some deep plan afoot, that's clear; else they should never have brought those sections of houses clean across the Pacific.

"And looket, Chet! Why didn't Suzunoya-no-Koji, that crafty Machiavelli, send the delegation as promised to these Guiacuras? It was easy to do and it would have been the diplomatic thing to do, altogether placating the warlike propensities of the Indians. More, it would have put those Indians irrevocably under his superstitious sway, made them putty in his yellow hands for any mold or purpose. He must have realized all that. It was a move entirely in keeping with his cunning. What then stopped him?

"And here's another leak in your yarn. You

say you know all about the mysterious sign of the mouse. Do you mean to stand there and tell me it means to the Japanese what Suzunoya-no-Koji said, or even that it has the obvious signification of the ancient Chinese cyclical animal; that in other words it has anything at all to do with water figuratively or literally? Really, don't you think it some sinister sign like the hair-ball of the black Voodoo worshipers, the five orange pips of the Ku Klux Klan? Maybe not so terrible I'll admit, but with some secret, symbolic and perverted meaning like the 'kid without the horns' of Voodooism that stood for human sacrifice.

"After all I fear, Chet old man, you're as much in the dark as ever. Why, oh why, did Suzunoya, the Wily One, bring those red-eyed, sleek white pets of his across the wide ocean aboard that crowded schooner? To awe the Guiacuras whom he doesn't even bother to conciliate with the promised delegation? Nothing doing!

"Here's something else, old man, something which happened to you at the very start. What did those Japanese mean by leaping out of the night and calling you a government agent? Of course there's old Suzu's explanation about them not knowing where they landed and fearing deportation, but you know as well as I that's all bosh, strictly the bunk!"

I slumped physically despite the sharpness of the pony's knobby back-bone that penetrated even through the folds of blanket I saw that all I knew, really, was the secret of the former understanding between the Indians and Japanese. About the promised delegation I was of two minds.

Perhaps those perfidious two, Kit Morley and his wife, had told of Mariquita's presence among the Guiacuras and of the war-party we had feared and had added that, undoubtedly now, the Mexican girl would arouse the Indians to similar hostile activity against the Japanese. But that should have caused the Retired Scholar to send his delegation with all the more despatch.

On the other hand, perhaps the presence of the sub-chaser in the bight of bay had caused Suzunoya to withhold the delegation. To judge from the watchers in the sand, those men who had called me a government agent, the *bonze* had feared we would follow his party. Should he send forth the delegation, we might trail it and thus learn of the superstitious hold he had gained on the Indians and realize that his tale of sappers and cooks was one monstrous lie.

Immediately we would wax altogether suspicious of his business there in Magdalena Bay; we might stick around to find out exactly what was the nature of that business; and certainly from all his fabrications and deceits, he showed desire neither for our proximity nor our probing.

Then had occurred, while he hesitated, a sweeping change in the status of things. The monkey crew of the schooner had come over us. It was done so quickly and handily that with the schooner still at his back Suzunoya-no-Koji probably felt now he would not be bothered with a poor few Indians.

There is this much true about a certain racial characteristic of the Japanese, all diplomatic amenities aside and candor to the fore. In Hawaii and in California where the man of Yamato is a familiar, no one would think of hiring him for instance as a chauffeur.

He would be polite, surely, and very eager to learn and entirely submissive at first to command; but let him work a week or a month for you and, while impertubably polite, he would not suffer you to tell him what you knew about the engine if it knocked; he would know it all; and he would take the infernal delight of a hare-brained boy in driving you at breakneck speed, risking all manner of collisions, just to see you, the master, pale.

He comes of a youthfully aggressive cock-sure race. Perhaps a bit of that cock-sureness had contaminated, with the successful boarding operations, even the highly educated and cunning Retired Scholar of the House with the Bell.

Thus I rested the matter as we chuted from the level green mesa down the sandy-floored ravine to the desert. Looking ahead I thought to raise those clay-coated, white-hooded scouts, under command of Quetzal, who had immediately preceded us. They were nowhere in sight.

AHEAD was only a great rolling solitude of sand, glittering like glass under the merciless flogging of the sun. Gray-white sage, dark bush and malformed cactus seemed to float on the radiant, quivering air like so much wreckage on the heaving bosom of an illimitable sea. A physical revulsion smote me. I felt like turning back rather than ride under the scorifying sun across that void.

I was busy tying a handkerchief over my bare head, the wound in which was athrob, when of a sudden I noticed that Mariquita had checked her horse atop a dune and leaving Metztli to ride on alone, was apparently waiting for me to come up. I dug my *guarachas* into the pony's flank, knowing I was in for it and desirous of facing the music as soon as possible. There would need be some tall explaining I knew, ere I could convince the girl that if this was truly Dicenta and some strange women ahead with the Japanese and not Morley and his wife, it was as much of a shock to me as to her.

She nudged the stallion into an even canter with the pony and we rode for a space in silence. I looked at her in fearful expectation of a stormy outburst. But her head was tilted forward, the broad brim of the sombrero shadowing her face and the long jet-black, silky lashes,

so rich with pigmentation, seeming to drip other shadows of deep purple upon her cheeks.

"*Señor*," she said at last not looking up, a surprizing catch as of deep emotion in her throaty viol of voice, "I regret exceedingly not having been able to arrive in time to hear what you said up there on the *teocalli*. But I was out on the mesa, fearful to come in lest Metztli should surmise I had visited you.

"Far off in the grass, I saw Temalacoatl the courier topple over. When I went to him and heard the news from his parched lips and swollen tongue I was filled with a blind Berserker rage. I would not believe you nor Metztli nor any one. But now Metztli has told me all you said and I fear, *señor caballero*, that perhaps I judged you too harshly."

She lifted her head and looked at me. I was astounded to note that her eyes were smoldering between the dripping lids like lakes seething with anguish.

"Oh, *señor!*" she appealed to me, her throat throbbing like the tender throat of a bird. "We are two alone among savages that can not feel for us! And I thought you so kind and sympathetic, so much the heart of gold! *Caballerete*, tell me that all you said to Metztli is truth and not lies!"

There was no sound for an interval but the crunching of sand under the plowing hoofs, the slight creaking of the silver-chased saddle and girth on the stallion. I was struck altogether dumb by this intensity of distress in her who but a few minutes gone had seemed so scornfully vitriolic.

"Mariquita," I at last found voice, "I do not lie to you. To me you have been everything that is kind and considerate. This man Morley and his wife, whom I believe to be with the Japanese, are no friends of mine. And no more a friend of mine is that fellow Dicenta whom I do not know, whom I swear I never have seen, for whom I have not an atom of regard or respect. Of all concerned you only are my friend, *mi señorita!*"

"But you do not understand!" she cried chokingly, her lips trembling uncontrollably, but her eyes unable to flood, beyond the mercy of tears, burning hot and dry. "Because fate made me a Mexican and fortune decreed me to live in a time of rebellion and chaos you judge me to be like any brown *peona* of the pueblos, a weak petal in the swirl of destroying armies, a mere baggage, insanely jealous now of this other woman.

"You tell me this man is not Serafin Dicenta, but a *señor* named Morley, that the woman is his wife, thinking that will ease my distress. Ah, *señor*, nothing can ease my distress, lighten my cross of suffering, bring back to me the home and hearts I loved!"

Her eyes were burning on, hot and dry, like flaming cressets in a marble wall.

"Who was it," she exclaimed, "that beat to frightful death with thorny stems of cactus, old Aunt Chonita, the good little foster mother of me? Who was it harassed my poor dear father to his early purgatory and then came to the *colegio*, with the three pebbles in the kerchief and his tongue in his cheek, to hound me with his fiendish Colorados, rob me of home and happiness and, had it not been for the intervention of good Padre Pio, to wreck and lay waste my whole life? Ah, *señor*, never can you realize one-half what a skulking footpad is this little rat called Serafin Dicenta!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE THREE PEBBLES

THIS was Mariquita's story as, to the creaking of the saddle, the constant crunch of hoof-plowed sand, I drew it from her then amid sharp breakings of voice and soft choked sobs, but no soothing release of tears.

Her name was Mariquita Cristine Arillaga. Perhaps its Spanish mellifluence sounded so beautiful in my ears because I was looking at the girl, entranced by her eyes that were dry and hot as sere brown leaves, her speaking lips that were like the under-petals of a rose.

Her mother, who had died when Mariquita was yet a little girl, had been of Austrian extraction, born in Mexico, where in a spur of the great Sierra Madre, the Durazno range, the maternal grandfather had owned valleys and mesas and mountain-tops that were partly in the northern end of Sinaloa and Durango, but mostly along the southwestern border of Chihuahua.

The maternal grandfather, one Wenceslas Jirasek, would have taken violent umbrage had you called him, she subtly qualified, a German or an Austrian. She remembered him dimly as a broad pink-faced bewhiskered old man, gruff and dour but with a heart of gold.

In his youth he had incurred the wrath of Vienna and been banished from the homeland of Bohemia because of his efforts with other patriots, toward the furtherance of equal rights for his countrymen and national language, his seeking to reestablish from desuetude the ancient constitution in modernized form. He had essayed to achieve what it required a world war to produce—autonomy for Czecho-Slovakia.

The Mexican *estancia* of her grandfather was called the Hacienda del Cazadero because when the exiled Jirasek had purchased it, with the money he had smuggled out ere the confiscation of his Bohemian estates and at only a few paltry pesetas the acre, it was but a wild mountainous place for pursuing game.

By the time Mariquita was a *niña*, it consisted of fertile valleys planted to wheat and beans, sugar, coffee, tobacco, maize and cotton.

There were thousands of sheep on the higher reaches, and cattle ranches on the more gentle slopes, and on the tablelands were vineyards heavy with large black grapes from which good wine and heady brandy were squeezed.

Wenceslas Jirasek had been a man with a vision. He had constructed a spur track out of his mountain fastness down to the Mexican Central Railway that cut Chihuahua in two like a meridian of longitude. He had built wineries, drying-sheds and *baraccas*, or storehouses for his hides, down in the little town of Guadalupe y Calvo. And there too had he established sawmills, cigar-factories and extensive dye-works where the Spanish moss from the high *riscos* added the purple and red hues, so beloved of the peons, to the *camisas*, *mantillas* and *serapes* turned out by the cotton-mills.

The fringes of his vast holdings he had divided into little forty and fifty acre sections and apportioned them out to exiled countrymen who had sought refuge with him and contract laborers from Spain and Italy who had fulfilled faithfully their agreed compacts.

It was all quite baronial. He was a beneficent power in the land. Indeed he was like some benign lord of a kingdom, isolated in the sierras, receiving through the year the grateful, willing feudal tenure of his lieges. Whole families were glad to leave their own little farms to aid the old *hacendado* in the tremendous harvestings.

About the beginning of the century an industrial upheaval shook through Spain, which added cogently to the work of stalwart Dewey and Schley in speedily terminating the war of that time to the credit of the Americans.

From Barcelona where the riots had been most violent a number of Spaniards were shipped to Vera Cruz with the good riddance of the queen-regent and a welcome awaiting them from Wenceslas Jirasek, ever on the lookout for the dissatisfied, visionary ones.

They were mostly Catalunians, than whom the famed Scotch themselves are no more hard-working and thrifty. One there was among them, a former leader of the riots, who no more arrived in the mountain kingdom than he perceived clearly the great benevolent agrarian scheme of the bluff old *hacendado*.

He was named Jorge Arillaga, a tall lean well-knit Spaniard; but he was more often called "El Cenizo" by his fellows because his sharp-chiseled, austere face was gray as ashes, as bloodless as the face of some convict or ascetic.

Perhaps it was because he so strongly sensed and shared the vision of Jirasek that the Ashy One showed from the outset such an engrossing interest in the manifold duties to which he was assigned. There was never a complaint from him over long or early hours, the hard rides when the beeves strayed or the unpleasant malodorousness of sorting the hides. Though intrenched in one kind of task, he was always ready to change to the unfamiliarity of another.

When trouble arose among the temperamental southern Spaniards who had come over on a later ship, when they would no longer work because that one was sick who had read romances to them, after the Andalusian custom, as they rolled and clipped the black cigars in the tobacco factory, it was the man from San Esteban del Piedros, El Cenizo himself, who bridged the unpleasantness by reading in a voice that was soft as silk, strangely incongruous from such a gray, emotionless mask of face.

Small wonder that within the year of his arrival El Cenizo should become through his intelligence and enthusiastic versatility the majordomo of all the vast *hacienda*, the prime minister to the king.

Thereat his work was never done. When the *solanos* blew from the east with icy blast and the little valley, wherein the gray stone *casa* nestled, became one leaden slant of rain, he would venture forth to rescue herders and rangers on the snowy uplands, sheep and cattle that had fallen into frozen crevasses.

When the Summer was on like a stifling furnace, everything sere and tinder-yellow, and fires raged on the timbered slopes and there were only wheat-sacks doused in wine to fight the tidal waves of flames, it was the Gray One again who with his own hands showed the men how to make back-fires, with his own hands dug ditches and felled trees to dam back the seas of flames. While others took advantage of the holocaust to dip their tongues instead of their wheat-sacks in the wine, he fought on with patience and fortitude.

And then to sweeten his labors and crown a halo about his responsibilities the one scion of the house, Mariquita's mother, returned from her studies in Europe and the frigid austerity of El Cenizo thawed, golden lights came into the tawny depths of his eyes, his chill blood leaped afire in his veins and it was ardent noon in his life.

Marie Christiane Jirasek had been in Prague three years as a special student at the National Czech University, one of the eventual results of her father's patriotic endeavors, where she had majored in the history of Bohemian literature. The oblong blue eyes and marble pallor of skin showed the Slavic strain. She was strangely beautiful.

She was educated but not pedantic, refined beyond snobbery, sensible, sympathetic and appreciative of worth in others. Alone in the gray massive Castle of the Eagles with the guttural old bear of a father, who tried with such clumsy effort to show his affection and pride in her, it was not strange that she should come quickly to an appreciation of the sterling worth of the quiet masterful Spanish majordomo, sense what lay beneath the many little favors he was forever and so gallantly accomplishing for her.

Even after he found that the girl reciprocated his feelings, El Cenizo was forced to pay court clandestinely because realizing his presumption he stood in much fear of the old *hacendado*. After a hard day of toil and more wearying responsibility, he played the bear secretively beneath her window in the warm nights like any forlorn young Spanish *novio*.

When at last he could abide no longer the fires of love corroding him to desperation, he went to see the gruff old Czech. He was thunderstruck, when he made known the delicacy and temerity of his errand, to note the sudden mist that dimmed the pale-blue eyes of the *hacendado*, to find his hand being shaken fiercely like the pump of a well and to hear the old fellow quavering in emotion-choked voice:

"I could wish for no better, I could wish for no better! Now I know the *rancheria* will prosper, all my young schemes bear fruit, and my little Krestana have a man who can well look after her when I am gone. I could wish for no better son than you, Don Jorge."

MARIQUITA was the only child of the marriage. She was christened after her mother, Marie Christiane. There were other inheritances from her mother which unlike her name would not lend themselves so easily to conform to Iberian standards. The features that through snap judgment and as a result of vague rumor I had thought Germanic—the short piquant nose, oval contour of face, long Slavic eyes, luxurious molding of body and a good deal the olive-fairness of skin—were all indubitable birthrights from her Czech mother. The lustrous black hair and silky lashes and the rich tawny pigment of her eyes were the gift of her Spanish father.

When she was only a *niñita* of eight, her mother died and she was taken in hand by Tia Chonita, who had been *criada* to the mother before her and always had seemed of the same never-varying degree of brown witheredness. The fact that his Krestana had preceded him in occupying the cement family vault he had built above the *casa* in the side of the Valley of the Eagles proved a severe blow to old Wenceslas Jirasek; he never fully recovered from it and eighteen months later he was laid away beside Mariquita's mother in the cold vault.

When Mariquita was twelve, Aunt Chonita took her down to the *Hospicio* of Guadalajara to be educated in the primaries by the good nuns. She was there four years. Rumors of trouble in the lowlands had reached the Hacienda del Cazadero and certain shipments of hides and cotton clothing, coffee, sugar, cigars and flour had never reached their destination.

Her father had laughed and said, rather cynically for him, that the upheaval would soon settle with the poor *peóns* no better off than before. Mariquita had no more arrived at the *Hospicio* than the full shock of the terrible, almost unbelievable news seeped in upon her through the stone walls from the outside.

Diaz had long since fled the country; Madero had been killed while in all the panoply of president; and now Huerta's mailed grip was weakening, and insurrection was once more lifting its many-fanged head throughout the land.

Men were springing up on every hand, proclaiming themselves inspired disciplies of the great Benito Juarez, new liberators of the people, spouting all manner of agrarian and church-and-state reforms, gathering together a handful of followers, and then showing themselves forth in their true light as *bandoleros*, superlative *salteadors de los caminos*, sweeping the countryside with fire, rapine and outrage.

Aunt Chonita called for the girl when she made her first communion, again when she completed her confirmation and lastly at the beginning of the Yule season of the fourth year. Because of military expediencies, the railroad being so necessary to all sides for the transporting of men and supplies, the Mexican Central remained for the most part intact.

Each time the withered brown *anciana* and the tall fair girl in the awkward stages of the early teens won to the *hacienda* without molestation; but every time the girl was put in great terror by the scenes along the way. The firmament had turned and times had indeed changed. Mexico seemed to her a country only of women shuddering in hovels and weeping beside smoking ruins.

This Christmas time however their train was shunted on a siding to allow of the free passage of a troop train. What a shocking sight was that to the convent-reared girl.

The soldiers and their women atop the clattering cars under shelters of boughs and stretched *serapes;* the men armed to the teeth with guns and revolvers, knives and glinting brass cartridges; the women crouched above earthen stone-ringed hearths, cooking in clay pots frijoles and chiles, and having all the appearance of brown witches as wreathed in smoke they swayed slightly on their hams to the swing of the train.

It was with immeasurable relief that the girl sighted down in the pocket of the hills the formidable Casa de las Aquilas, with its outlying trellised cottages of the help, its storehouses, drying-sheds and granaries and the cement family vault bulging out from the side of valley above. The casa was built along the lines of that combination of Spanish and Moorish architecture called Mudejar style, four-square, gray-stoned and massive, with red-tiled cupolas pierced for musketry and rising up at each corner of the roof like the watch-towers of a veritable fort.

Her father was quiet and contained as of old, his gray face more sharply chiseled she thought,

but his velvety voice most soothing to overwrought nerves.

The revolution had hit him sadly. The spur down to the Mexican Central had been torn aside by the vandal Orozco and his Colorados and as a result the cotton and lumber mills, the dye-works and tobacco factories of Guadalupe had been forced to close, and the granaries and *barraccas* in valley and town were bulging with crops which the faithful tenants had gathered, but which could reach the outside only on fortunate and rare occasions.

Her father was reluctant to talk about his reverses. The little kingdom might be worse off, he said. The small landholders on the outer fringes were clinging tenaciously to their sections, helping with the herds and harvests when needed and above all ringing about the *hacienda* such a bulwark of feudal strength as to daunt the daring of the most headlong bandit. And Mexican bandits do not lean as a rule toward intrepidity. They are a skulking lot, formidable only in ambush or with preponderance of numbers.

Mariquita learned the most of this as, neglected needlework in lap, she sat pensive of wintry evenings, behind the fluted columns of the inner piazza and overheard the house-servants chattering below her beneath the peach trees of the *patio*.

Her father had admitted there had been a few desertions to the ranks of the revolutionists; but he had been most temperate about it all, probably remembering his own fire-pulsing youth. Mainly the decamping had occurred among the town folk of Guadalupe y Calvo, thrown out of their accustomed employment, he had explained through the enforced closing of the mills.

But there was one desertion the girl sensed, which was rankling him deeply—the almost treasonable apostacy of the son of one of the small landholders, whose father had been a younger confrere of old Wenceslas Jirasek himself. The trouble was that the lad's father, Jeroslav Difarik, had thought that he as a Bohemian and not the ashy-faced Spaniard, Arillaga, should have married Mariquita's mother. The boy who had changed his Czech name to the Iberian one of Dicenta, had been raised by the soured father in the conception that had things been fulfilled as rightfully ordained, he should not have been a mere tenant, but the heir of the whole vast Hacienda del Cazadero. Dissatisfied and ambitious, Serafin Dicenta had been the only one of the smaller landholders to turn renegade.

WHEN the Christmas season was drawing to a close, Mariquita had begun preparations to return to the good sisters of the *Hospicio*. Gently then her father had shaken his head. El Cenizo had larger plans for her, he said.

She was to go to this University of Salamanca where he himself had matriculated and where in supposedly backward Spain women have traditionally worn the garb of males in order to be able to study with convenience and as equals in the same classes as the men. Then might she go on later to the National Czech University of Prague where her own dear mother had studied. It would be as her grandfather would have desired.

But Mariquita quickly perceived that he was thinking more of her safety than of her education, that really he wanted her to leave the chaotic country. She knew he had planned for her to go, first, to the Colegio de Nuesta Señora de Guadalupe of Zacatecas and thence, in post-graduate work, to Spain and Bohemia.

She would not listen to his compromise of the College of Notre Dame in New Orleans or that of Trinity in Washington; she would not be a deserter; she would never consider quitting Mexico, leaving the poor *papacito* behind. Churches and convents were no longer safe to be sure; but then what was safe from the vandals in these terrible red days? The *Colegio* of Zacatecas was several hundred miles nearer hand than the *Hospicio* and while it continued to function, might she not just as well be cloistered there with the good nuns, gaining education and elusive culture?

It was reasoning shot with as many holes as a sieve; but her father's heart pulsed like a flame with pride at her bravery, her evident love and sacrifice for him. Yet the heart of him tripped in its beats every now and then, in the course of that journey he undertook to see her safely to the *Colegio* of Zacatecas.

She was there through the anxious drear length of almost three years. Once during that time, in the hot Summer of the second year when El Cenizo himself came for her, did she journey home.

Her father still was the cold austere man of iron, but his face seemed more sharply chiseled, more deeply lined, and something of its gray hue was grizzling the silky luster of his black hair like ashes of mourning. That startled and greatly worried Mariquita. His hair was of that strong pigmentation that does not early turn gray.

But yes, the *hacienda* was still escaping with fair fortune the general rioting; only more and more, the ring of small landholders that had been his bulwark of feudal strength were packing up, deserting their farms and scampering in various disguises to the States. The bandits as a result were encroaching closer, with more of daring and less and less of ruth. The mills, gas-plant and great *barraccas* of Guadalupe y Calvo had been sacked and burned to the ground. Poor Aunt Chonita, who had happened into the town, drawn by the smoke and roaring flames, had shrilled curses on the heads of the Colorados. The blue-coated wolves had beaten the

old faithful nurse to death with long, heavy, thorny stems of cactus.

Mariquita shuddered and froze white.

"*Oh, mi pobre mamacita!*" she gasped in dry voice. "Oh, poor Tia Chonita, the good little mother of me!"

Her father had sworn, a strange rare thing for the Ashy One to do.

"Your pardon, Xina, *mi carina*, but it is all so abominable, so detestably vile!"

He thought it the atrocious work of that son of misfortune, that renegade Serafin Dicenta, who had been among the first to bolt the *hacienda* and who was leading, now that Orozco was beaten and his Colorados dispersed, a marauding band of these guerrillas with the red hearts on their blue jackets.

If the Ashy One could only drive his cattle and sheep across the plateau of Chihuahua and down the sandy plain to the Rio Grande and the safety of the American border, El Cenizo would quit Mexico himself and the Hacienda del Cazadero forever.

Mariquita burst out weeping. The shock of the cruel death that had befallen her old nurse was finding outlet in tears. But her father, man-like, misjudged the cause of her grief. He laughed shakily a bit, with an unrestrainable undernote of bitterness.

But never fear, he assured her, there was small chance of him undertaking the fleeing project. Chihuahua was a very nest of brigands, overrun by a scourge of fiendish Colorados and barbarous Villistas, and he could never hope with all his herds, to win through.

Mariquita's continued and disconsolate weeping shook the man of iron more than the girl could have understood. He saw then, not so much what he himself had been contemplating relinquishing, but all he was losing for Xina, the soul of his life. Her patrimony, given into his trust by old Wenceslas Jirasek, was about to be thrown to the four, nay, forty winds of revolution. It must not be! He would yet cling on for the sake of his poor little one, and manage thankfully enough with bread and butter until the good *Dios* sent the jam.

He did not object so strenuously as hitherto when, in tan knee-boots, military cord breeches and bolero jacket of deerskin, with a belt about her waist bristling with cartridges and weighed down by two Colts, Mariquita came to him and proposed returning to the *Colegio* of Zacatecas. Goodness knows, he admitted, it was hard on the brave little *niña*, alone in the gray stone house while he went out to beat off, with few and fewer followers, the sporadic attacks of that retero, Serafin Dicenta.

Perhaps it would be safer for her in the *colegio*, after all, than here in the mountain fastness where he was ever the objective of an hereditary hate. And in the *colegio*, too, her mind would be occupied with studies. Should he be killed in the meantime, she would yet remain, a Jirasek and an Arillaga, to escape alive out of the holocaust.

This was perhaps the outcropping of the slag in the cold austere man of iron. He was weakening under the constant buffeting from every hand and from behind. There was ever a dull beaten look in his tawny eyes nowadays, but still was he contained and markedly grim.

Ere he left her in the reception room of the *colegio*, he gave her certain instructions. She was to assume the riding-habit she then wore and affect as much masculinity as possible, should he have to send for her or should anything befall the *colegio* in his absence. This *hombre*, Zapata, was riding the roads close about and he was filled with fear for his little one.

Also, there was little use depending any more upon the railroad which was seesawing continually from the hands of constitutionalists to the hands of revolutionists and was forever being torn up by the ousted parties. He made arrangements, therefore, in the carefully concealed corral of the college, for the stabling of Mariquita's horse, which was to be well fed but never brushed during its stay, lest some glimpsing *soldado* be tempted to covet and confiscate.

He had one more injunction. Should Mariquita receive at any time three pebbles wrapped in a bandanna kerchief, she would know that he wanted her, dearly needed her, and she should ride to him as fleetly as her horse could travel.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MESSENGER

THE country of tragic shadow faded away; once more the glare of sand and sage was blinding my eyes; and I saw the cause of the interruption to the girl's story, the balbriggan-striped priest Metztli riding toward us, his heavy fetlocked bay churning up the sand into small following balls of dust, his mud curls sweeping behind like stiffened snakes.

"La Caballera del Sol," he called questioningly, as he came up, "is this *hombre* to be sent back? Or do you agree with me that he speaks truth, that he is a friend of the Guiacuras and as such and because of his own private grudge should be allowed to accompany us?"

The elusive olive tinge of the girl's cheeks deepened into pink flame. She remembered her harsh suspicions of me and instantly, in unexpected and decisive answer, snapped open the flap of the holster on her left hip and drew forth and handed me the Colt.

"Behold, Metztli, O Reflector of the Sun," she replied. "I trust the *caballerete* now implicitly. He is all I believe that he told you."

She glanced at me with shy eyes from under

dripping lashes. Then as Metztli swung about and with bare walnut-brown heels kicked the heavy bay into the lead, she resumed her story:

ONE day in the early Spring of the present year the three pebbles arrived. A nun glided along the corridor to Mariquita's room and gave the bandanna-wrapped stones into her hand.

"Ah, Mother of God!" the girl exclaimed fearfully. "It is the three pebbles of San Esteban! Oh, my poor father, the poor *papacito* of my soul!"

The three pebbles were an old peasant sign having reference to the stoning of St. Stephen or San Esteban. Her father had thought of it because he had been born in the Tarragonian town of San Esteban del Piedros—St. Stephen of the Stones. Her poor father needed her.

"But who brought them?" she inquired through her tears. "My father, Don Jorge, himself? But no! It must be some withered *anciano* who will die now no doubt of the long ride!"

The nun shook her head that was covered with the white starched headdress and long black veil of a medieval day.

"None of them you think, my child," she returned. "It is a young man in the moreno uniform of the Carranzistas—a lieutenant with a little golden mustache and bright hair.

"You are certain, *querida*, these stones are a sign from your *padre?* This *teniente* is pleasing to the eye and I know in these troublous terrible times the good Mother Superior will never suffer our little dove to go forth with him, unless she is very positive he comes as an empowered emissary from the noble Don Jorge."

"Show him to the reception room, sister, please," said the girl, her brown eyes misty and baffled. "And you must wait while I talk with him, so that we both can make sure he comes with the correct credentials. But *y pues!* how could any one surmise the sign agreed upon between my father and me, that old peasant sign of San Esteban? No; something dreadful has befallen *mi pobre padre!*" And she fell once more to weeping.

The man in the khaki uniform of a lieutenant of Carranza's army, smooth of cheek, waxed of small mustache, blond-headed, short and dapper as a dancing master, proved to be none other than the arch enemy of her father, that renegade and soured one, Serafin Dicenta.

"God of my life!" the girl cried shuddering, covering her eyes with her hands. "My father! He is dead! Oh, the poor father of me!" And she would have fled in blind terrible panic from the presence of the lieutenant had not the nun stood in her way, insisting that she hear the man out, and had not the man himself caught one of her hands from her eyes and, talking breathlessly, holding and stroking tenderly her hand, pleading and palliating, vowed the constancy and fervor of his friendship for herself and her father, his eternal contrition for anything and everything he might have done.

He had sharply and altogether suddenly awakened to the savagery of those Colorados of his, he swore. He had turned sick at it all and had joined the ranks of the Carranzistas expressly to hunt down his former *compadres* because of their fiendish cruelties. He had heard that the barbarous ones had been harassing the good El Cenizo. Wherefore he had gone to El Cenizo himself, in the uniform of the recognized government and learned the shocking truth.

The very day of his arrival in Guadalupe y Calvo, on his way to the *hacienda*, a troop of Colorados had swept into the town, burning and pillaging. El Cenizo had come down out of the hills with a small body of men. The men were killed or put to rout and El Cenizo, wounded severely, was captured. Shot through the lung as he was, the frightful Colorados had slung up the *hacendado*, by his wrists, to a cross-beam in the charred skeleton of one of his own mills. They had warned the women of the town not to cut him down, nor to tell where he was hung. Then affrighted by some scare, probably the false report of a new levy of tenants coming down the hills, they had fled leaving the Ashy One to die by slow inches, of thirst, of torture and of his throbbing wound.

Mariquita moaned through blanched lips and teetered back and forth on her feet. The nun, seeing her poor charge an agonized thrall to the man's terrible words, slipped soft of foot down the hall to fetch the Mother Superior and at the same time in case of need, a glass of water.

Through the morning, the merciless sun of noon, El Cenizo had swung there until, about eventide, Lieutenant Dicenta had happened into the pueblo on his way to the *hacienda* and noticing the smoke of recent fires, the dumb fear of the women who fled to cover like stricken creatures at sound of his horse's hoof-falls, he had forced them to reveal the truth.

He himself had cut down the *hacendado*, had laved his sunken-cheeked gray face, washed his wound and squeezed water, drop by drop, upon his protruding swollen tongue. For minutes long as burning in purgatory, he had thought the Gray One dead; then, oh so feebly, there was a flutter of heart!

Horror and great pity stayed, as in a frame, the Mother Superior and soft-footed nun in the doorway. The water from the glass in the nun's trembling hand spilled a little on the rug but neither she nor the Mother Superior noticed. They had thought only for the distraught swaying girl whose eyes were like harvest moons in a bloodless face.

Dicenta did not desire that El Cenizo should

see him immediately for fear that the shock in his weakness might kill the *hacendado*. The brown *peonas* of the village had told him, to his own boundless astonishment, that he was suspected of having raided Guadalupe more than once with these wolves, the Colorados.

He wanted El Cenizo to recover a bit ere he should attempt to deny the vile tales and show that, even when he himself had ridden in youthful heedlessness with the dread-red-hearted ones, never, never had his hand been lifted against the Hacienda del Cazadero or the least of its good folk.

HE WENT on to the *rancheria* to see that all was well there and to gather what landholders still remained. Then with five elderly men at his back, all that he could find, he returned to the village. One of the *ancianos*, he sent a horseback for reinforcements to the El Dorado Mine, the nearest quarters of the Carranzistas, where the shafts and stamp mills had been taken over by the constitutionalists and a government mint established. Then he had interviewed El Cenizo.

Of course, the good Don Jorge, crediting the hideous things he had heard of Dicenta, was appalled to see him; but the women had told him that it was Serafin himself who had cut him down; and he proved willing to listen to the lieutenant's side of the story.

He was too weak to nod his head, to raise a hand; but he could whisper. And in a whisper he averred that he believed Dicenta's story, discredited the terrible gossip he had heard of him, put firm high trust in his avowals of faithful friendship. Indeed, to show the strength of his reborn faith in the man, he had imparted to him the knowledge of the secret sign which would cause Mariquita to come to him. Ere he died, he wanted to see his poor little one.

"But I don't believe, I can't believe!" cried the girl hysterically. "You killed most cruelly my poor Aunt Chonita and it was those same venomous wolves of yours who hanged my father! Oh, I know, but your arrival seems too well-timed and propitious, your change of front too sudden and sugar-sweet. It is all a plot.

"You have harassed my poor father to his grave and now you come, a Colorado in Carranzista uniform, a wolf in sheep's clothing, to get me into your slimy tentacles. Oh, you little rat, you beast, you—you vulture!"

She would have beaten distractedly at his face had he not leaped back, a hurt expression in his washy blue eyes.

"Child!" gasped the Mother Superior.

"*Señorita!*" exclaimed Dicenta. "I have a letter, a letter from El Cenizo himself! It was I who steadied his hand and, only because he wants you so badly, did he gain strength enough to write!"

She quieted abruptly, ominously.

"Give me it," she said.

He fumbled with the frontal braid of his uniform and from an inside breast pocket produced a folded paper. But the letter was not written in the familiar running, bold chirography of her father; it was an almost indecipherable scrawl, shaky and uneven as though penned by a palsied hand. It might be a forgery or it might be grim evidence of her father's plight. However, she thought she noticed, in the awry-dotted "i's," the long-crossed "t's" and flourishes to the "y's," certain characteristics of her father's hand. With labor, she read:

> Xina, my soul: Naturally you will be shocked and suspicious but I believe Serafin speaks truth. He has been of great aid in my extremity, surprizingly brave, kind and considerate. No doubt, pained by the frightful things charged against him, he is bent now on showing us, for certain and beyond question, the true heart of his friendship. Put faith in him, and in the good Lord. Serafin is the only one I have to send, as the few others are so old and helpless. I am dying I fear, child of my life, and I want you. May the Mother of Sorrow and Compassion look with divine pity on your journey and bring you safely and speedily, my poor little one, to your father.

A torrent of tears came to the relief of the girl. The Mother Superior gliding from her station in the doorway drew the note from the girl's limp fingers and read it over slowly. Then she nodded to the palpably uneasy lieutenant. She believed the authenticity of the letter and the truth of his story, knowing naught against the man save the inkling hidden in his own vague admissions and in Mariquita's few overwrought ejaculations. She begged him to be most gentle with their little beaten dove and amid a plentitude of pious and sincere invocations, godspeeded them on their way.

CHAPTER XXIII

WORDS SENT UP FROM PURGATORY

WHAT proved to Mariquita a ride unforgettable, seared into her memory like a flaming brand of the whole consuming tragedy of Mexico. Once they sighted, ahead along the road, some artillery. In a yellow eclipse of dust crept toward them the gray straining mules, the rumbling tumbrils and limbers, the sleek lean guns almost toppling over with the jouncing pace.

Aboard the rattling carriages and caissons, the great-hatted drivers crackled their long *latigos* to attract attention to themselves, their teeth chattering with the joltings, but their eyes flinging bold glances at the unconcealable feminine lines of the riding-habited girl.

She did not think it strange that at Dicenta's behest they should leave the road to the artillery train and hastily make a detour through the cloaking growths of a near-by arroyo. The sombreroed drivers were garbed, she swiftly noted, in such a multiformity of uniforms—khaki and peon cotton aternating indiscriminately with charro suits and linen—that one could not be sure what they were, constitutionalists or revolutionaries. But a similar hiding-out under different circumstances a bit later on, resurrected all the old suspicions of her escort.

It occurred the same afternoon. From far off beyond some gray tall alamo-trees came the hysterical chatter of rifle fire, the nervous stab-stab of machine guns, the booming of cannon and, that most terrible of all sounds of war, the crash and whistle of exploding shrapnel.

A swarm of men swept across the road ahead as if to reinforce one of the opposing sides; they were all in the khaki of Carranza; yet Dicenta clutched the bridle of the girl's horse and swung both Mariquita and himself behind the cover of some cottonwoods. Not before, however, certain of the belted and bandoleered men glimpsed the girl, an animal look unleashed and glittering in their pebbly eyes.

It may have been dread of these men as rampant individuals that actuated the lieutenant. But from other developments Mariquita thought it something more cogent, selfish and sinister than that. He was fearful of his own safety. It was as if he were not entitled to wear the uniform that fitted him so smartly.

"It is frightful, yes, *mi señorita*," he would say soothingly as the girl shuddered at some horrid sight. "Ah, my poor Mexico, when will it ever end! But look there, *chiquita!*" And then perhaps he might point out a scene of such unprintable animality as would tear the veil of life brutally from the eyes of the convent-reared and carefully nurtured girl. At these times there was in his own weak blue eyes the same pebble glitter that had showed in the eyes of the battling men.

It was with a relief, indescribable and immeasurable you may be sure, that Mariquita sighted at last, down in the swale of the hills, that gray stone massive mansion built, with beetling watch-towers, after the formidable Mudejar style.

Nimbus clouds were draping the sky, portentous of rain, hanging low, fat and weighty from one jagged rim of valley to the other like a tapestry, thick and ruffled and black. Below the vale of sunshine was muggy with shadow. Down its drear length no creature showed, no plant or feather of wind stirred. Everything was gloomy and breathless, petrified with heavy immobility, as in the pause before a storm.

The great iron-barred gate was bolted fast and looking through the grating down the dim portal to the brighter *patio*, she could see no one moving. It seemed forsooth a house of the dead. She beat with swiftly mounting agitation upon the gate. There was an eternity of waiting and of knocking with her little fists, the sounds echoing dismally through portal and court.

Then at last a wrinkled brown woman of the household swathed all in black, came padding in carpet-slippers across the *patio* and along the darkness of the portal. Ere opening the gate she peered fearfully through the grating.

"My poor little child, you have come! Ah, thank God!" she said in a strange dull voice.

The words were each a dagger stabbing to the quivering heart of the girl. All her vague forebodings clamored fiercely. She commenced shuddering, shuddering in every limb. She grasped the old woman by the shoulders. Hoarsely she whispered—

"My father, is he—dead?"

The old woman moaned—

"Ah, Mother of God, not yet, but soon, terribly soon."

The girl groaned, her lips white, her eyes like great frozen pools in the marble of her face. She rushed into the *patio*, down the dark corridors toward her father's chambers. Women—*criadas*, stooped *ancianas*, brown *peonas* who had known her from infancy, came toward her through the gloom and seeing who it was, fled with prayers sputtering from trembling lips, moaning and sobbing.

At last she was in the passage that led to her father's bedroom. It was very dark and still here. She became suddenly sick with fear, her bosom heaving riotously, her heart pounding the wall of her chest, her eyes almost unseeing. She put hand on the door-knob. In a tremulous stricken voice, she cried out—

"*Mi pobre papacito!*"

Some one stirred within the room. Some one said:

"Xina, *mi querida! Ah, Dios*, thank you; it's my poor little one at last!"

It was her father, Don Jorge, speaking in a faraway quavering voice she never would have recognized as his. With a low moan, inarticulate like the moan of misery of an animal she opened the door.

HER father lay upon the bed, the wan light throught a window lighting dimly his features and the stark red wounds of the Christ on the crucifix upon the little table by his head. But that was not the head of her father—it was so changed, so old!

The black hair was white, a white hue that seemed a cloudy silver in the nebulous rays through the window. The gray skin of his face was drawn tight as the skin of a drum, and the cheek-bones and aquiline cartilage of the nose were straining as if on the point of breaking

through. Deep-sunk and rimmed with shadows his brown eyes were black and glassy as agates.

She threw herself upon the bed and kissed the stubbled lips, the ashy cheeks. Her body shook with long terrible sobs, she moaned, she shuddered, and then at last she began to weep as if she would weep forever.

After a little she drew out of the abyss of despond and they talked. The white napery of the little table and stark effigy of the Man of Sorrows, hanging to a tiny ebon cross with realistic red wounds in hands and feet and side, showed plainly that the last rites had been performed and her father prepared for death.

In a calm, resigned though breaking voice, the voice of one speaking up from purgatory, her father told her of the movable slab in the wainscoting of his bedroom, behind which, if she would slide the panel back, she would find a black metal box. When she brought the box to him, he whispered that the key of its lock was in the little scapula bag over his wounded swathed chest. Within the box she saw a roll of papers, a bundle of folded documents, imposing with gold seals, a number of small brown and black books and a miniature salt sack that, when she lifted it, clinked metallically.

He had her hold up each document in the wan light before his glassy eyes. The antique scrolls were the original deeds of patent to the *hacienda*, he explained, stamped and sealed under the hand of Lerdo de Tejada, who preceded Diaz in the presidency. The paper written in Czech was the last will and testament of her grandfather. That deed of gift, properly witnessed and sealed, but never recorded, was the evidence of the transfer of the estate to her which he had executed when she had left him that last time for the *colegio*.

The brown and black leaflets were the savings and check books on Mexican banks which no longer existed, but which might be reestablished, some happy day, and thereat liquidate their obligations. What gold he had been able to gather through the troublous times he had put into the small salt sack. Also, therein, in a tiny leather bag he had placed her mother's pearl necklace and platinum-set diamonds, and the two keys to the family vault up the valley.

She was to take the tin dispatch-box and all it contained. She was to flee with Serafin Dicenta as her escort across Chihuahua to the Rio Grande and that land of refuge, the American States. Yes, he trusted Serafin now without reservation, implicitly. He only wished that, ere they undertook the perilous journey, the two might marry.

"No, not that, my father; oh, not him!" Mariquita cried out. She tried to say more; but her tongue filled her throat and she could only gasp shrilly and pant for breath, as she leaned close to catch his failing whispers.

But yes, that would be the best thing. Mexico was a hideous place for an unmarried girl. And Serafin was a good man; he was much the same race as herself, her mother and her grandfather; and he had been the only one brave enough to cut her father down from his crucifixion. Otherwise he might never have seen his little one, and hung there to become the torn contention of feathered scavengers.

Yes, child, it would be best that they should marry. Then all the imagined wrong, the old old wrong that had rankled down through father and son, would be assuaged and righted. He had spoken to the priest who still clung on to poor Guadalupe, good Father Pio Abogado, who had given him that day Extreme Unction, the final solemn rite of the church. He had instructed Padre Pio to return, that very afternoon, ready to perform the marriage ceremony. He would be willing to die then like Samuel of old, contented and at peace.

Even as he spoke of the closely hovering blackness, a shudder shook through him, stretched and stiffening his lips, loosing his strong Spanish jaw shockingly.

"Xina, I am dying!" he whispered hoarsely, clutching with long dry fingers at the wound in his bandaged chest, his eyes widening frightfully. "My little one——"

Grief struck the girl mad. Swiftly, fiercely, she crushed the trembling lips to her own. Then, the taut eyelids pulling down as if under the weight of some monstrous burden, she slipped off the bed and lay in a swoon of numb despair upon the floor.

CHAPTER XXIV

AGAIN THE SIGN OF THE MOUSE

NOW, as Mariquita visualized for me the tragedy of her father's death and with the pity of it all, tears finally misted the hot dryness of her eyes. We drew across the white dunes toward a swale of bottomlands set out like an unkempt orchard, with a low grove of mesquite and a bushy underwood of ashy-hued soap-weed.

My pinto stretched his neck and shook his narrow head to loosen further the already slack reins and then of his own volition and with a certain enthusiasm increased his pace, as if he sensed ahead in the copse, a good feed on the mesquite pods or some pool of hidden water.

We brushed through the oval-shaped gray leaves of the weeds, swept beneath the elongated mesquite pods and thorns, almost atop the tufted pastern-joints of the reddish cob on which Metztli ambled.

All at once to the piping and shrill whir of disturbed quail, we broke out upon a little clearing, an open amphitheater, black with soft loam in which the canine spoor of coyotes was imbedded. Cutting the clearing almost

precisely in two was a thin trickle of water that bubbled up at one end and sank out of sight at the other.

The pony whinnied his joy and telescoped his spotted neck to drink. In my own way I was glad to stretch my cramped limbs and to wet in the blackish rill my tongue and the handkerchief about my head. But, regaining my feet, I was sharply mortified at almost falling to the ground with the brittle feeling of my legs.

To conceal such evident show of equestrian amateurishness from the eyes of the oncoming bucks, who seemed more at home on horseback than on foot, I leaned against the pinto and made ado to refold the blanket over his bony ridge. Then the sleepiness stamped out of my legs and the pony lifting his narrow head and dribbling water with prodigal satiety from thick lips, I cinched up the girth a notch or two and turned inquiringly to the high priest.

"Is this where we are to meet up with Ichcapilli and his scouts?" I asked.

"No, *señor*," he shook his mud curls. "We have the great Salina, that vast dazzling field of salt to cross, ere we come to the mesquite flat of rendezvous which is far larger than this."

I approached the girl, who had recovered her composure.

"Let us ride on, you and I, Mariquita," I urged, "as I am most eager to hear the conclusion of your tragic story."

I had noticed that Metztli was eying us oddly, but I did not think aught of it until now when, addressing him, Mariquita requested permission to ride ahead without waiting for the bucks, two by two, to come up and water their horses.

"What is the sharp hurry, la Caballera del Sol?" he returned suspiciously, looking from the girl to me and back again.

I thought for a trice he suspected us of plotting together some treachery or desertion. But no; he knew as well as we that, not only were Mariquita and I just two against a hundred, but more, even had we contemplated such a thing the desert of sand was too open to allow of running away. What then could be actuating him, sharpening his black eyes with cold calculating light, fluttering his mind with suspicions? Was it mere jealousy of his own authority? I took a chance on this last.

"Of course, *señor don sacerdote*," I said with polite humility, "if you purpose remaining here for a while, fearing the Japanese may sight us should we draw closer in the sunlight to their encampment, I would not think of going ahead, nor of doing anything else that might hurt or upset your plans."

He shot me a narrow glance.

"We are still too far off," he snapped, "for the yellow men to see us. It is not that, *señor*. But why should you two be so desirous of riding on before the rest of us? Is it because you and Mariquita have found some interest in common more engrossing than this crusade of the Guiacuras?"

What it was all about dawned on me then. The high priest was simply the victim of jealousy. But not jealousy of his own authority. He was suffering all the cold envy of a rejected suitor watching the apparent successes of another. Mariquita and I were getting on too famously for his peace of mind.

I might have chuckled outright at the idea, but just then on the very heels of it, came a thought that sobered me surprizingly. I'll admit Metztli was by no means a dashing looking suitor as he stood there glowering with envy in breech-clout and red, blue and yellow balbriggan underwear, his hair done out in baked mud curls; but he was the leader of these Indians, and it struck me that maybe behind Mariquita's refusal of his well-intentioned and no doubt altogether respectful proffer of marriage, was something more compelling than any sense of the ridiculous. It was something binding, perhaps, and irrefragable; for instance, the immutable fact that she was married already to the Mexican lieutenant, Serafin Dicenta!

I looked at the girl in dismay that startled me with its profundity. She was shaking her sombreroed head in mild reproof of the priest.

"Oh, Metztli," she said, a trifle provoked but still good-natured, "it is only that the *señor* is interested in what is now a twice-told tale to you—the story of my tragic days in the homeland of Mexico. If you will but lead the way, O Reflector of the Sun, we shall be glad to follow in your tracks. But there is hardly any need, do you think, for us to wait until all the *hombres* have watered their beasts."

Thus, through Mariquita's diplomacy, it was arranged and once more to the crunch of hoof-ploughed sand, the slight creaking of her leather saddle, the girl went on with the recital:

WHEN Father Pio Abogado, in black bowl-crowned, round-brimmed felt hat and long sable cassock, trudged up to the Valley of the Eagles, that lowering Spring afternoon, he came prepared to perform the sacred ceremony of marriage; but his first duty he found was to sprinkle holy water and read a last litany over the rude pine box that held all the earthly remains of El Cenizo.

Then the crude coffin was placed in the cement family vault up the valley alongside the rich cabinets of Mariquita's mother and grandfather; and the priest walked back to the gray, stone *casa* with the girl.

"My heart sobs for you my child," he said, "yet my lips stumble at utterance. But *mi alma*, what use are words, anyhow, to lighten the weight of a cross!"

She thanked him with her great eyes but said nothing. She was dressed in the black silk of mourning from slippered foot to lacy mantilla. Her face, in startling contrast, was white as pure Carrara marble. She was strangely quiet, apathetic, like one walking in a void, benumbed with sorrow and desolate despair.

Father Pio Abogado watched her from the corners of eyes that were like living pools of dark cold light. He was an old Spanish priest of the secular clergy who still hung on to his little parish of Guadalupe y Calvo, though most of his male communicants were gone, his church burned to the ground and only brown sobbing women remained to seek his advice and share with him the burden of their woes. He had a tall lean Spanish frame, a thin somber Spanish face and a long absolute Spanish jaw, blue from much shaving. He was a brave man, dominant over sin and sinners.

The two walked for a space in sympathetic silence. Febrile gusts of wind were stirring the muggy stagnancy, swirling dust and twigs along the footpath, shivering the lithe young pines with chilly rustle and flapping the black skirts of the priest's cassock.

Overhead a tremendous movement was sweeping the sky. The laden rain clouds were streaming across the oval of mountain rim like the black plumes of some monstrous whirligig set suddenly and mightily into racing rotary action. Below, between the gusts, there was ever a down-bearing hush and immobility.

"This marriage your father desired," spoke the priest at last; "is it also the wish of the *señorita?*"

She turned to him then, her hands at once out and appealing, her eyes livening with uncontainable alarm.

"Oh, Father, I fear it is hasty and ill-advised. But what would you? It was the dying wish of the *pobre padre* of me! I must not weaken; I must go through with it. It was a command, Father, sent up from purgatory!"

"At his death," said the priest gently, "your father, the noble Don Jorge, was not the man of iron you knew so well. From the time he was taken down from his living cross, he was weak and feverish, given to delirium, thankful, oh, so thankful for the little we could do for him.

"He was thankful in the same way to Dicenta. Serafin was the only young man about; your father had been a veritable *conquistador* himself, strong with a youthful ardor even after he was no longer young; and he recognized and respected the quiet strength of the stripling. He longed to lean upon that strength, he was so wracked with wrongs and buffetings."

"It was all fear for me, Father," she quavered breathlessly. "Fear for my safety, unchaperoned and unmarried, on this journey of tomorrow. 'Mexico is a terrible place for a young girl,' he said over and over again. And it was his dying wish, the command he sent up—"

"Child," the priest spoke slowly, thickly, as if each word were causing him some inward effort, "Mexico is a terrible place, true; but more terrible still would it be for you to discover that the man you swore before God's high altar to love, honor and cherish, was one whom a very snake would fear to bite lest it be poisoned by a virus more deadly than its own."

"*Padre!*"

"My little one," he took her arm heartenningly, "Serafin Dicenta was not at the tomb today. As I came out of the hut that I now call my church and my rectory, since the others were burned, I saw Dicenta entering the store of the yellow man. Ah, it is strange," he apostrophized, "the power these yellow men have in our land today, where they can plow and sell and build unmolested, while we of the Cristinos Viejos are hounded from pillar to post!"

Mariquita remembered then the surprize she had experienced when riding through Guadalupe that morning on her way to the *hacienda*, she had noted a new general store rising, freshly painted and unscathed, among the ruins everywhere about. The incongruity of its prosperous appearance amid all the charred débris of desolation would have been sufficient of itself to grave the picture ineradicably into her mind; but the unparalleled oddity of the sign-board, swinging above its lintel, had added a searing impression that she was to recollect only with virulent hatred later on when she should arrive among the Guiacuras. On the sign-board was depicted the image of a white mouse, dormant, head between forefeet, long bald tail curled underneath.

"This yellow man you speak of, Padre Pio," she replied. "He is the Japanese *comerciante* who had opened that *Botiga* of the Mouse down in Guadalupe? But yes, it is most strange. In my astonishment at what business he could do here among all the terror-stricken and wretchedly poor, I questioned Serafin about him as we made through the village.

"Serafin told me that the Japanese merchant has letters to Carranza, to Villa and to Zapata, gold-sealed, bulky official letters, and that he comes of a nation that will not allow one little finger of its people to be harmed, unlike those long-suffering Americanos across the Line. He has much, much gold, Serafin said: he has cast slant eyes of longing on the Hacienda del Cazadero; and as we have to leave the *estancia*, it was Serafin's suggestion that mayhap we could sell the place to him. That is why the *teniente* went down there this afternoon, *Padre*—to see if he might negotiate a sale."

"He has the deeds then?"

"*Si;* every last one of them and, besides, the other key to the vault. I thought perhaps he might meet you, Father, and give you the key

so that you might come the sooner and sprinkle a little holy water therein ere we brought to it my poor father's coffin."

The priest shook his shovel-hatted head.

"Ah, my poor little one, I fear it is all one vast plot! If this yellow merchant has gold, it is because the Colorados have brought their spoils to him.

"His shop is more a *bodegón*, a tippling-house, than anything else. He keeps aguardiente, anisette, mescal, tequila, pulque, all manner of fiery liquors, some of which he brews himself and all of which he stores in the back of his shop.

"The frightful Colorados always halt there to drink and to blaspheme and to talk blusteringly. But they never confiscate the liquor nor touch a beam of the den, a hair of his black head. And that is not of a piece with their usual wantonness. It is more than strange; it is marvelous. Myself, I think this Japanese is some sort of agent or fence of the Colorados."

THEY had reached the iron-barred gate of the *casa* which was rattling, to hollow echoes, in the occasional vehement gusts. The priest looked down the dimness of the portal. On the stone flagging bits of dry rot were performing rotary spirals in the swirling wind. But there was no one lurking within to overhear what he was about to say.

"Mariquita," he said, "on the raid before this last tragic one, the Colorados brought with them an army trunk, one of the new sort, no bigger than a good-sized portmanteau, flat and oblong. It was slung on panniers to a sumpter-horse and when, to bring it into the shop of the Japanese, they removed that chest, it seemed very heavy for all its smallness, requiring four men to carry it, one beneath each corner. I was watching their every move through a crack in the door of my vestry and they must have spied me; for that was the time, child, that they burned my house and my church.

"As soon as they shook the dust of the village from their heels, I climbed the hills to inform your father, the brave Don Jorge; and it was because of his suspicious occurrence that he came down, alone and single-handed, into Guadalupe.

"He went into the *cantina* to interview this Japanese and determine what was in the trunk, why it should be brought there, what connection this yellow man must surely have with the frightful Colorados.

"The Japanese proved very urbane and gracious, inviting your father to drink with him, showing him all through the place. Politely but firmly, however, he denied ever having seen or heard of the army chest. It was some wild hallucination of the women, he said.

"Your father was persistent, having faith in the source of his information, and the Japanese was enabled thus to hold him in the shop for some time. Meanwhile the yellow man sent word somehow to these Colorados. He must have sent word, because it was then, and all on a sudden, that the wolves skulked into the town and shot and hanged your father like a poor sheep."

"But why!" the girl cried out, her mind a débâcle, rended with conflicting thoughts, but with one more violently clamorous than all the rest. "Why did you not cut down my father after the Colorados left? Oh, Padre Pio, why did you not do that and save my poor father and me from all the machinations of this Dicenta!"

There was pained and stunned astonishment in the lean somber face of the priest. Then quickly his long bluish jaw clicked shut and protruding. Clearly as if she had repeated to him every false word of Dicenta, he saw through it all. His eyes became pools of pellucid calm light.

"Child," he said, "you know your Father Pio speaks truth And I say it was I who *did* cut down you good father; yes, Padre Pio alone, within a half-hour of the departure of these fiendish Colorados. No one would aid me; the women were too fear-filled; and it hurts me now to think that when your poor father slipped from these feeble hands and thudded to the ground, it may have hastened his death."

She was swiftly contrite.

"Ah, forgive me, Father! I might have known. But I am all so harassed by lies and deceits, my thoughts are a mad whirl. I only feel, *Padre*, that instead of harming my poor father in the fall, it was your courageous act that gave him the lease to live till my coming."

The calm pools of the priest's eyes fluttered with the emotion of his thanks.

"Then up into the hills I went," he continued, "to rouse the *ancianos* who, with all the tenaciousness of us old ones for the little things we have won in this world, still clung on to their farms. I had left your dying father in the living-rooms of this Japanese as they were the best quarters in town, miraculously untouched by the pillaging and burning endured by us suffering Christians.

"When I returned with five of the old men, I heard to my astonishment that Serafin Dicenta in Carranzista uniform had unexpectedly put in an appearance. When I would have gone into the sick room, the Japanese stopped me, blandly telling me Dicenta was in there."

"And Dicenta told me he himself had cut down my father! Oh, *mi pobre padre:* he must have told you the same smooth lies as you lay too weak to move! Lies, all all lies! Oh, the vile sneaking *lagarto*, the skulking rat."

"Hush, my little one," the priest quieted her. "Remember only that he who digs a pit for his brother will himself fall into it. It was Dicenta's

plan no doubt to arrive in the nick of time to act the seeming savior of your father. I spoiled the plot but as it was he stole my fire. That's why he closeted himself with Don Jorge. He told your dying father it was he who had cut him down!"

"And my poor father believed! That is the terrible part, Father Pio. Believing him, trusting him implicitly, my father would have me, his only child, marry the wretch!"

The girl was overwrought, her bosom heaving riotously, her whole frame shuddering convulsively with utter horror. The priest patted her shoulder.

"Do not fear, Mariquita *mia*," he said soothingly, hearteningly. "Your father was weak, already suffering his purgatory. It was not for him to think that this Dicenta should know of every vice an ounce and of sheer heartlessness a shocking measure. Your poor father could never imagine that a human being could be so viciously debased as to take advantage of a dying man!

"But you and I child," he added with growing heat, "we know that this Dicenta is not at all what he pretends to be. He is a Judas betraying with the kiss of friendship. He has bared his true hideous self. He is a cockatrice whose very breath is fatal!"

She turned to him then.

"Father!" she gasped. "You mean that the dying wish of my poor deluded *padre*, the command sent up from purgatory——"

"Need not be obeyed!" he finished for her, pounding out each word sharp and explosively, as if under the forcible lift and fall of his outthrust bluish knob of jaw. "You are absolved from such awful fulfillment my child. You shall never marry this Dicenta! Instead you shall remain here for a little until God in His sublime pity tells us what to do."

He turned to leave; paused with swift thought; swung back.

"I will sleep in the casa tonight, child," he child," he said. "Meanwhile, I go below, to the village, to see what Serafin is doing toward selling the estate to the Japanese. There are some folk who might call this spying," he added, his eyes blazing in the thin and somber face like living pools of dark cold light. "My little one," he ended thickly, "*I* call it the long arm of God!"

TO BE CONTINUED

The Eighteen-Twelver

by Farnham Bishop

Author of "Wood and Steel," "The Red Witch," etc.

"SHADES of the past!" exclaimed Captain Jefferson Hallett, U. S. N. "Here comes old Jonathan Gifford." The group of officers gathered about the door of the commandant's office in the Washington Navy Yard turned with one accord toward the newcomer striding briskly toward them from the entrance of the yard.

"Back in uniform and walking with his regular quarter-deck stride," commented a side-whiskered lieutenant-commander. "Has the Secretary given that old relic a ship?"

"Lord help the crew if he has," replied Hallett. "I was a reefer on the *Brandywine* when Gifford commanded her in '34. He broke the Western Ocean passage for a ship-of-the-line, and mastheaded me eighteen times. Hardest-driving old devil in all the old Navy. Knows as much about sail and cutlases as Nelson did, and as little about steam and ironclads as——"

He paused for a simile, which was promptly supplied by the spruce young commander of the new double-turreted monitor *Kiawosting*—the last word in naval architecture in that Summer of 1862.

"As Mr. Secretary Welles! Old Gideon came aboard for a visit of inspection yesterday afternoon, stamped his heel on the deck-plates and said—

"Why, the durned thing's holler!"

The laughter that greeted this historic remark died away at the nearer approach of Jonathan Gifford. Bearded captains, themselves beginning to turn gray, could not help but feel something of the awe his lean, clean-shaven Yankee face and ice-blue eyes had instilled in their souls when they were midshipmen under his command. To them he looked unreal in the straight-peaked cap, loose trousers and long frock coat of the sixties; Jonathan Gifford's proper garb was the white silk stockings and tight knee-breeches, the cocked hat and the spike-tailed coat with its bullion epaulets and its collar as high as the wearer's ears, of the three decades that centered in the War of 1812. Though he had long since retired from the service and was now resurrected as the junior of most of the officers present, all instinctively saluted the erect old veteran as he joined the group.

"Good afternoon, young gentlemen," he creaked affably. "I've been following the course of the immortal John Paul Jones—the best thing for any American naval officer to do when he's in doubt and can't seem to make any headway. Do any of you happen to know how he came to get command of the *Bon Homme Richard?*"

There was a unanimous shaking of heads; the seamen of the Civil War were too busy making history to remember the minuter details of the past.

"He was stranded at Brest, writing letters to French Ministers of Marine and American committeemen in Paris, for month after month, and nothing to show for it but a bellyful of windy promises. Then he happened to clap his eyes on a line in Benjamin Franklin's almanac—

" 'If you want anything done, go and do it yourself—otherwise, send.'

"Paul Jones took the hint and the first coach for Paris, where he soon got them to give him the old East Indiaman, the *Duras*. Out of gratitude to Franklin he changed her name to the *Poor Richard*—or the nearest he could come to it in French.

"For the past year and more I've been writing from my home in New Bedford, offering my services to the government. Last week it came to me to do what Paul Jones had done. Down I came by train and bore straight for the Secretary of the Navy. Before the young whippersnappers in his office could head me off I was alongside his desk.

" 'What do you want?' he asked through more whiskers than I'd ever supposed could grow on one human face at the same time.

" 'I want a fight,' " I told him. 'I've been fifty years in the Navy, man and boy, and never been in action yet. They said I was too young to go to sea in 1812, and all I got in the Mexican War was yellow fever off Vera Cruz. Now I want a ship and a chance to do something with her. I'll take anything that can float and carry a gun.'

" 'Very well, captain,' said the Secretary after he'd seen what manner of man I was. 'I'll give you a vessel and put you on the blockade. I guess an eighteen-twelver ought to know how to make prize-money out of the Britishers.'

"So here I am, gentlemen, with my commission and orders in my pocket."

There was a chorus of congratulations.

"What ship did he give you, captain?" asked several voices.

"The gunboat *Hoboken*. Any of you youngsters acquainted with her? She's new since my time."

"Why, yes, I've voyaged on her more than once," said Hallett while the rest snorted more or less violently with suppressed emotion. "She's a very good craft indeed—for the legal blockade."

"Just what d'ye mean by that—the legal blockade?" demanded Jonathan Gifford, sensing a joke at his own expense and glaring his fiercest.

Hallett, towering high above him, smiled benignly. He was having the time of his life, instructing and patronizing the master of his boyhood.

"It is like this, captain. The best way for us to capture the fast British blockade-runners that have been slipping into the Southern ports with munitions and out again with cotton is to intercept them on the open sea between our coast and Nassau. That has been the cruising-ground for our swiftest ships, like mine yonder."

HALLETT pointed to the trim sloop-of-war *Plattsburg*, lying in the Potomac with a red flag at her main, taking aboard her powder and shell from the lighter moored alongside. The fleetest cruiser in the whole United States Navy, she was worth commanding in those days when a richly laden blockade-runner brought a small fortune in prize-money to her captors. Hallett commanded her for two reasons: First, because he was a skilled and capable officer; and second, because his wife's uncle was a skilled and capable politician. Having a relationship by marriage with the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, the captain had become a wardroom and Navy Yard authority on diplomacy and international law.

"Johnny Bull's been protesting that his ships aren't lawful prizes and our blockade a real one unless we've got something like a continuous line of craft all up and down the rebel coast. It isn't enough to have a fleet off Charleston and another off Mobile, and so on—the law sharks say we've got to nail 'No Trespass' signs along the whole fence. Otherwise when I sight

a poor innocent Britisher steaming westward out of Nassau, overhaul him and find both holds chock-a-block with blankets and percussion-caps and knapsacks ready-branded 'C. S. A.,' why then the presumption is that he wasn't doing anything so wicked as breaking a blockade, and the prize-court lets him go with a kiss for him and a reprimand for me.

"So, just to lend the judges and the State Department a hand and ease things all round, the government has been clapping some sort of a war-ship into every sound and inlet from here to Mexico. They'll do to pick up the small fry—keep the Johnny Rebs from eating too many fresh oysters and terrapin—and to make our deep-water captures lawful prizes. That's what I mean, Captain Gifford, by the legal blockade."

"Oh, ye do, eh?" shrilled the indignant eighteen-twelver, his voice breaking into falsetto with age and wrath. "So you think you'll teach sea-law and sea-fighting to me, who taught you all you ever learned, and scandalous little it was! So you think I'm to be stationed in Okra Sound just to catch fishing-boats and oyster-sloops, and to lend a color of law to your gay and care-free privateering off Nassau! I'll bet my next six months' pay against yours that in that time the *Hoboken* makes more prize money than the *Plattsburg*."

Hallett gasped, as did most of the bystanders.

"Why captain—you don't mean——"

"Young man, Captain Jonathan Gifford means what he says and says what he means, the same as when he used to say, 'Masthead, sir!' back in the thirties. Cover that bet or back water."

Hallett turned an angry red above his beard. He was an arrogant man, but not a mean one. He would not back down publicly but he could not bet on a certainty, especially with an old man who presumably had little in the world beside his pay.

"Wait till you've seen the *Hoboken*—" he began.

But the veteran cut in vehemently. The exhilaration of getting into active service after a half-century of waiting was as potent as Medford rum and as damaging to the judgment.

"I don't care what manner of craft she is," he cried. "I don't care if she's the crankiest ten-gun brig in the fleet, or even one of these new-fangled iron sheer-hulks that carry both batteries in a tin tea-canister; I'll back her against the *Plattsburg*! I say so now, and I'll say so after I've seen her. Where is she now?"

"Moored alongside No. 2 Dock, just abaft that schooner," said Hallett, pointing.

Jonathan Gifford looked, saw, and—in spite of the sub-tropical heat of a Washington Summer—turned cold. He had offered to take anything that could float and carry a gun, and Mr. Gideon Welles had given just that. The U. S. S. *Hoboken* was a converted Hudson River ferry-boat!

"HOLD her steady," commanded Captain Gifford through the open window of the pilot-house.

To himself he added—

"Five minutes more and I'll be within range and in a fight at last!"

The *Hoboken* was chugging valiantly up the deep, narrow ship-channel that zigzagged across the shoals and mud-flats of Okra Sound. Instead of Manhattan Island or the Jersey shore, she was headed for a neat brick pentagon pierced with the square openings of gun-case-mates and topped with a tall flagstaff flying the Stars and Bars. This was Fort Moseby, built twenty years before to defend the head of Okra Sound and the entrance to Port Caroline.

Jonathan Gifford's orders said nothing about attacking this enemy fortress, but they were equally silent about his leaving it alone. The department had taken it for granted that he would content himself with maintaining a regular blockade.

The old man had had his fill of that off Vera Cruz. He waited only until he had drilled his raw crew and volunteer officers into passable men-of-warsmen. Between drills he studied the fort through his long brass telescope.

"Those gun-ports are built for twenty-four pounders and nothing heavier," he decided. "I'll move up within easy range for my big Dahlgren and batter that brickwork to bits."

A ten-inch smooth-bore pivot-gun was mounted on what was officially the ex-ferry boat's forecastle, and four thirty-two pounders on either broadside. Hinged bulwarks, built across her open ends to enable her to go to sea, were now dropped to give a free field of fire. The pivot-gun was loaded, primed and trained. The gun-crew stood by in tense expectation as Captain Gifford came down from the topsides to the beautifully holystoned and carefully sanded deck. He opened his mouth to give the command—

"Fire!"

Then up from the bottom of Okra Sound sprang a mighty column of chocolate-colored water, directly in front of the *Hoboken's* bows and nine times as tall as the top of her funnel. Up it rose and down it came—souse—all over the holystoned, sanded deck, all over the shiny brass cutlas-hilts, the well-polished pivot-gun, the natty new uniforms and the astonished faces of the crew. The gun-captain instinctively pulled the lock-string, but the hammer fell on a soaked and dispirited paper cap.

Knocked down by the weight of the falling water and the upward heave of the bows, all those who had been standing on the forecastle were washed aft like straws in a gutter by the flood that swept through the broad gangway

where the Jersey market-gardeners used to park their vegetable-wagons on the four A.M. trip. Mr. Budlong, the chief, who had been leaning out of the engine-room door to watch the bombardment, pulled in his head and slammed the door just as the prone and wrathful Jonathan Gifford slid past head foremost on the crest of a two-foot wave. The captain was using language which the admiring but prudent Mr. Budlong chose to interpret as "full speed astern."

As he reversed his engines the *Hoboken* pitched the other way barely in time to save her skipper from being swept overboard astern. Fetching up against the side of the gangway, Captain Gifford sat up and looked behind him. The ebbing flood had left the deck and everything upon it painted thick with evil-smelling slime; his own uniform, his hair, his very mouth and nostrils were full of the foul stuff. Framed in the far end of the gangway he saw a sunlit, rapidly receding vision of Fort Moseby with the Confederate flag flying more jauntily than ever. Neither side had fired a shot.

"This is the —— of a way to fight a war!" spluttered the eighteen-twelver.

WORDS similar to those used by Jonathan Gifford, more softly accented but equally harsh in tone, were being spoken at that same moment by Colonel Montague Ashley, C. S. A., the gallant commander of Fort Moseby, to his cousin and second-in-command, Captain Carter Vance, on the subject of mines, or as they were called in those days, torpedoes.

"Why in the name of common sense—and fo'teen other things—didn't you wait till that thus-and-so Yank was right on top of that demijohn of gunpowder befo' you touched it off? Then you'd have busted him wide open instead of baptizin' him and scarin' him so he'll never come within toe-nail reach again. Fo' ——'s sake, Carter, what was ailin' you?"

"Buck-fever, colonel—just plain buck-fever. Like what a hunter gets when he starts to shoot his first deer. It was my first try at torpedoing a ship, and all of a sudden my hands took to shaking so powerful hard that befo' I knew it I'd brought the ends of both wiahs together and closed the circuit.

"Soon as I'd done it I was all right again and ready to catch that Yankee with the next torpedo when he started to turn around. 'Stead of which he went scootin' backwards like a water-bug on a pond. I've never seen any steamboat act thataway befo'," declared Captain Vance.

"Must be one of those new double-ender gunboats they're building fo' river-work," decided the twenty-year-old colonel.

Neither he nor his cousin had ever been a hundred miles from their native city, and the conventional type of ferry-boat, though invented fifty years before by that versatile New Yorker Robert Fulton, was still unknown at Port Caroline. But the young men of that town were anything but backward when it came to fighting.

"Carter," continued the colonel in calmer tones, "I'm getting mighty tired of sitting here slapping mosquitoes and watchin' that no-account Yank parading up and down the Sound all day and lying there with a light burning all night as if he owned the place. Last week he captured that schooner-load of lumber we were counting on for barracks. I'm going to commandeer the *Southern Belle* and pay Mr. Yankee a visit some time in the dark of the moon."

"That old shingle-work river-boat wasn't built fo' rough and careless usage," cautioned his cousin. "One solid shot would smash her into locofoco matches—and set 'em alight."

"It's going to be a surprize visit, Carter, and in the dark, as I said."

"Wouldn't you like a nice spar-torpedo to ring the door-bell with?" asked the captain solicitously. "I'm powerful short of detonators, but I reckon I can fix you up."

"Thank you kindly, Carter, but I'm sort of prejudiced against these modern improvements right now. I'm going to take a hundred of our fightin'est men and give 'em a chance to use their bayonets and bowie-knives."

DRIFTING silently with the ebb, the *Southern Belle* bore steadily down on the one bright spot in the otherwise unbroken darkness of an overclouded night—the riding-light of the Northern gunboat. The once white paint of the river-steamer's tall topsides was daubed over with the blackest mud; her forward deck was packed with gray-clad soldiery.

More than one young infantryman, nervously handling his bayoneted, unloaded musket—left unloaded by Colonel Ashley's orders—kept thinking of his last mid-Summer night's voyage on the *Southern Belle*. Moonlight on the upper river, scent of magnolias from the banks, her face beside his as they sat together, over there by the rail. Summer of 1860—two thousand years ago!

Nearer and nearer they drifted to the light and its long, wavering reflection in the water. Still there came no challenge, nor any other sound, from the anchored craft. Straining his eyes to catch the loom of the enemy's squat hull, each soldier began to visualize the imagined outlines of impossible naval monsters bristling with masts, funnels and enormous guns. Nearer and nearer—now they were close alongside. The imaginary war-ships vanished; but where was the real enemy?

"Colonel," whispered the aged skipper of the *Southern Belle*, "there hain't nothin hyar but

a lantern stuck on a spar-buoy. We-all had better light out o' hyar right sudden, befo'——"

The rest of his words were drowned by the appalling crash of a broadside. A solid shot plunged into the water hard by the starboard paddle-box, another flew screaming across the open boiler-deck, a third made a total wreck of the cabin pantry, while a ten-inch charge of canister ripped and splintered and tore through the river-boat's flimsy stern-works from guards to texas.

Their own high courage saved the astounded but untouched soldiers, who had crowded forward in their impatience to be among the first to board the foe. There were no casualties aft because there was no one there to be hit.

A rocket curved up out of the dark to starboard and burst with a glare that lit the Sound like day. There lay the *Hoboken*, about five hundred yards from the *Southern Belle*, boarding-nets rigged fore and aft and her guns already run in and being recharged for a second salvo. Captain Jonathan Gifford always shifted his moorings a couple of cable-lengths as soon as it was good and dark, leaving the buoyed lantern as a decoy for cutting-out parties and holding himself ready to blaze away at anything that came between him and the light.

The rocket-flare died down as the *Southern Belle*, in her skipper's phrase, "lit out of thar right sudden." She had a good head of steam bottled up in her boilers, and her big paddle-wheels shot her light, shallow hull ahead and around in a sweeping curve that carried her safely past her adversary's stern and over a broad shoal where the heavier Northern gunboat could not follow. More rockets and broadsides blazed from the *Hoboken*, but the only result was to shoot away the gilt trotting-horse that hung between the river-boat's spouting smoke-stacks.

Jonathan Gifford slipped his cable and started up the channel as fast as he could steam, hoping to intercept and cut off the fugitive before she reached the shelter of the fort's guns. But the *Hoboken* was no racer; sunrise found the *Southern Belle* safe above the mine-field and the fat ferry-boat waddling discontentedly back to her old cruising-ground.

"Might as well try to catch a trotting-sulky with a stone-boat," growled Gifford. "Young Hallett was right and I'm a blamed old fool. Durn it, I'll miss that six months' pay. This old turtle of mine can't overhaul anything except a sailing vessel in a flat calm."

He glowered at his one poor little prize, lying waterlogged at her anchorage because she was not worth a prize-crew to take her North; a leaky, dirty coaster, laden with condemned tents and cheap pine lumber. He looked at the floating bits of wreckage, drifting in on the flood-tide, that his guns had chipped from the *Southern Belle*. A flash of color caught his eye and the long brass telescope came to bear.

"Stop her, Mr. Budlong," Captain Gifford called down the engine-room voice-tube. "Mr. Humphrey, lower away the port cutter and pick up that stuff floating there. If it's what I take it for, I've got a notion how to use it."

THE skipper of the blockade-runner *Gray Fox* shook his head as he looked at the cruiser following astern.

"She can't overhaul us or work up within range, but we can't shake her off. We haven't gained or lost the half of a knot between us since she sighted us at dawn. I thought we had the legs of anything in the Yankee Navy."

"It's their crack war-steamer, the *Plattsburg*, and no error," said the mate, standing beside the captain on the railed top of the port paddle-box. "If we can keep ahead of her we haven't much to fear from the rest of them."

"But we can't go barging into the Charleston squadron tonight with the *Plattsburg* letting off rockets and signal-guns a bare two miles astern. And it's no use running out to sea again. She can stick this pace until something carries away, and we can't. Coal, you know."

The mate nodded; it was the custom of the runners to carry barely enough Welsh for the open sea and anthracite for the inshore work to make the round trip between Charleston and Nassau. The rest of the bunker-space was filled with Enfield rifles, quinin or flannel shirts that cost three shillings and sold for ten dollars gold apiece. The sea-chests forward, the state-rooms aft, were packed tight with private ventures. One lucky voyage out and back would more than pay the entire cost of ship and cargo, with a handsome profit besides. Small wonder that the Clyde and Tyneside yards were busy turning out fast new ships for such a trade.

Fastest and newest of them all was the *Gray Fox*, and her cargo was the richest ever carried out of Nassau. She was worth, as she floated then, at least two million dollars, and the *Plattsburg's* crew were already spending the prize-money. But the British skipper was a veteran at the game.

"We'll put about and nip into Port Caroline," he decided.

"Can we cross the bar with our draft?" asked the mate.

"Just about—at the crest of the flood; and we'd reach it then if my tables are correct. I've heard there's a Yankee gunboat stationed there now; if so we can see her in time to sheer off and try Charleston after dark."

Swerving westward, the *Gray Fox* and her pursuer sped toward the wide entrance of Okra Sound. As the English craft drew within sight of Fort Mosely the mate gave vent to a bitter oath.

"Charleston it is, sir! Here comes your Yankee gunboat, slap in the fairway!"

"Yankee your grandmother's cat!" yelled the skipper, dancing joyously up and down on the paddle-box. "It's a Confederate ironclad of the *Merrimac* type. See her ensign. See the shape of her."

Square and sloping amidships, with a half-submerged ram and flying the Confederate battle-flag, the black-painted hulk moved slowly down the channel. Her engines seemed barely able to make headway against the incoming tide. She moved like a waterlogged hulk and looked exactly like a wood-cut in *Harper's Weekly* or the *Illustrated London News*. As the runner drew near, the ironclad turned clumsily about until the length of her blocked two-thirds of the channel.

"Ship ahoy! What ship is that?" hailed a voice from within her built-up pilot-house.

"The *Gray Fox*, from Nassau to Port Caroline. What ship is that?"

"The United States gunboat *Hoboken!*" whooped the exultant Jonathan Gifford as the captured Confederate ensign was hauled down and the Stars and Stripes run up. "Heave to and stop your engines."

"Thanks, no," answered the plucky Britisher, and rang four bells for "full speed ahead."

The great feathering floats of the blockade-runner's wheels tore the water to foam; her sharp iron prow bore straight down on the gunboat's broadside. Unprepared for such an attack, the startled gunners made poor practise; the holes they punched through the *Gray Fox's* thin plating did nothing to check her speed.

The *Hoboken* backed water barely in time to escape being cut open and sunk. The Britisher's stem struck and tore away the whole elaborate structure of wood and canvas with which Jonathan Gifford had disguised his bows. It melted and sank beneath the whirling blows of the churning paddles as the tall gray hull flashed past and up the channel.

Around swung the baffled gunboat and pounded after in hot pursuit. The painted canvas curtains that had hidden the overhang of her hull and the paddle-wheels beneath now flapped grotesquely with the vehemence of her quivering engines. She looked like a fat apple-woman chasing a predatory small boy, and with about as much chance of success. The *Gray Fox* was already half a mile ahead and drawing close to the shelter of the mine-field before the *Hoboken's* crew could clear away the rest of the wreckage and bring the pivot-gun to bear.

"Stand aside, boy," commanded Captain Gifford. "I'll lay this gun myself."

The ferry-boat was bobbing up and down in the steamer's wake, and the big smooth-bore was an awkward piece to aim. But the eighteen-twelver had learned his trade on far less stable decks, with far more primitive guns. Lock-string in hand, he sighted for the base of the fugitive's funnel as she swung around an angle of the channel, and let drive.

Even as he did so the *Plattsburg*, coming up astern, fired her Parrott rifle; the brief delay and the bends of the channel had brought her within range. Both bow-chasers spoke together; both blinded the men behind them with a stinging white cloud of black-powder smoke, till the vessel drove through and clear. At the sight before them the crews of both Union war-ships gave an exultant cheer. One of the shells had burst impotently in the air, but the other had struck squarely against the blockade-runner's port paddle-box and burst inside, shattering the wheel to bits. Whirling about, the stricken *Gray Fox* ran far up on the shoal and grounded on the soft mud.

Up raced the *Plattsburg*, soon overtaking the laboring *Hoboken*, which, greatly to Captain Hallett's surprize, drew aside and let him pass.

Around the long curve of the channel the cruiser swung with ever diminishing speed, till she stopped almost abreast of the stranded steamer. Down dropped her boats and away they pulled to take possession of the waiting prize.

But when the *Hoboken* had swung aside she kept on, out of the channel and straight across the shoal. Jonathan Gifford knew the bottom of Okra Sound as well as he did the surface. Though the *Hoboken* was of deeper draft than the *Southern Belle* she was a skimming-dish as compared with either of the two ocean steamers; the tide was at flood and a short-cut perfectly feasible. Placidly she waddled across the bows of the *Plattsburg's* cutters and docked herself alongside the motionless *Gray Fox*. An armed boarding-party, assembled on the cabin-roof, had a short leap and an easy scramble over the Britisher's rail. They had run up an ensign and were passing a tow-line before the *Plattsburg's* swearing boat-crews had returned to their own ship.

Dropping astern of her prize, the *Hoboken* tugged at the tow-rope with all the strength of her powerful engines. The *Gray Fox*, not yet settled into the mud, stirred, slid off, and was towed away stern foremost.

As they drew abreast of the *Plattsburg* Captain Hallett spoke through a speaking-trumpet to his old commander:

"That vessel is my prize, sir, not yours. I sighted her at sea, chased her in here, and stopped her after you had failed to do so."

"Oh, you did, did you?" answered Jonathan Gifford. "Who shot away her port paddle-wheel, I'd like to know?"

"I did, sir," claimed Hallett. "Your shell went wild; my foretopmen saw it leave your bows and burst in the air about half a mile dead ahead of you and nowhere near the target. They will testify so in the prize-court, sir."

"And so will the captain of the *Gray Fox*, and I guess he's an equally competent and less biased witness, sir," retorted Gifford. "He swears that he saw *both* shells leave my bows one after the other, sir."

"What!" cried the astounded Hallett. "Then where did mine go?"

"Right through my ship from stern to stem, sir. Blew all our caps with the wind of it, and nigh deafened us with the scream. You fired at the chase and raked your consort—raked her fore and aft. And at that you didn't hit anything, sir!

"The *Hoboken* doesn't mind a little thing like that; she's a fine ship, sir, a —— sight finer than your gunnery. Go back to your station, sir, and don't try to teach seamanship and straight shooting to an eighteen-twelver!"

The Long Traverse

by

Samuel Alexander White

Author of "The Call of the Crimson Star," "The Void Spaces," etc.

OVER the conference of the Hudson's Bay Company's post agents of Norway House District, gathered in evening session this tenth of July at Norway House, situated at the entrance of Great Playgreen Lake, the northern arm of Lake Winnipeg, presided Charles Burnham, the energetic and despotic governor of the Ancient and Honorable Company.

The Northwest Fur Company and the Hudson's Bay Company had settled their differences and merged their fortunes in 1821. By the terms of the merger the Northwest Fur Company lost its identity in the Hudson's Bay Company and from the new Montreal headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company, Governor Burnham had come on the long canoe trail to Norway House. Up the Ottawa River through Lake Nipissing and the French River, through Lake Huron, the Sault and Lake Superior; on through Rainy Lake, Lake of the Woods and the Winnipeg River to debouch at last into Lake Winnipeg itself; thence northward along the lake shore through terrific storms and winds that always harried the three-hundred-mile stretch of waters, his famed Iroquois crew had carried him in a great six-fathom canoe decked with banners and carpeted with robes of fur in all the barbaric splendor of Northern overlords.

His was a momentous coming, for he would either take a bride away from Norway House in the person of the factor's daughter or depart as a governor scorned, leaving many evil consequences behind him. Momentous, not for Burnham alone but for many more of Norway House, for Jacob Travis himself, for Clara, for the Free Trader Steene, hiding like a hare in the forest, who stood in the governor's way.

It was the annual gathering of the Hudson's Bay Company's officers. Norway House was the capital of that vast area of Northland that bordered on the shores of Lake Winnipeg. At the wilderness metropolis the affairs of the outlying districts were supervised, the fur harvests gathered, the trade expansions planned, and from all the scattered posts by lake and stream men thoroughly versed in the business of the wild delivered reports and gave sage council to the presiding head.

Opposite the governor sat Henderson, chief brigade leader of all the Hudson's Bay Company brigades, fresh out of the York Factory district that bordered on the shores of James Bay; and on round the council table were ranged the factors of the far-flung Norway House district posts; Barrett from Split Lake, Sherman from Nelson River, McTaggart from Beren's River, Corbeau from Grand Rapid.

Jacob Travis, chief district factor and agent of Norway House itself, sat at the governor's right, his ponderous frame leaning forward in the council chair, his elbows on the table and his brown, sinewy hands clasping his gray beard as he played the part of listener to Burnham's pungent words.

Upon his granite features, roughly chiseled by the grim sculpturing North, the light fell in a shining flood, turning his bronzed skin to a golden shade, changing the keen gray of his

wide-set eyes to the blazing shimmer of topaz. He hung intently on Burnham's speech, and it was evident from the contraction of his great forehead, ordinarily smooth as a polished boulder, and from the compression of his mouth that it was not merely an issue of trade but a vital personal matter that was being debated.

For Jacob Travis knew, as did every other agent in the room, that on his daughter's acceptance or rejection of the governor, on the capture or escape of Nelson Steene, hung his future with the great company.

"I ask you plainly, Travis," the governor cornered him. "Are you shielding from me this man Steene who had been hunted out of the district and bottled up in Great Playgreen Lake by Henderson's post runners?"

"By the painted star of the company I swear I am not," declared Jacob Travis vehemently.

"You do not know his whereabouts this very night?"

"I do not."

"But I'm certain that his daughter does," interjected Henderson, whose post runners were scouring Great Playgreen Lake to find their bottled man even while the session was in progress. "I have as much faith in Jacob's word as I have in my own. I do not doubt him. But it is not enough that he takes an oath across this table. Have him call Clara and let her swear to the same thing."

Travis was on his feet like a flash.

"Governor Burnham, I object," he almost shouted. "It is not fitting that a woman should be sworn before this council. If it is an affair of hers—and I can not deny that it is—it is an affair of the heart and not the business of the Hudson's Bay Company."

"Yet if by her personal leanings she complicates the company's affairs, her sentiments immediately become their business," argued Burnham. "Jacob, you'll have to call her,"

"And what if I do?" cried Travis, flinging both arms wide in a gesture of helplessness. "She will not tell this council anything she knows. You have spoken plainly, governor, and I in my turn will speak as plainly. I will not force her to speak against her will."

"Nevertheless she will not swear to anything false," decided Burnham. "Henderson has information that she can not evade, and we can narrow things down till we get Steene. Go on and call her."

It was the decree of superior authority. Travis grimly obeyed it. He struck a bell that stood on the table at his right hand, the bell that summoned Drumming Grouse, the bowsman of his canoe, his messenger and man servant about the post. Immediately the door of the council room opened and Drumming Grouse the Cree bowsman stepped in.

A picturesque figure, tall, lithe-muscled, he framed himself in the doorway, the light striking vividly upon the brilliant colors of his costume, the dyed fillet on his head, the tricolored sash, the gorgeous beads and embroidery of his moccasins and leggings.

He posed thus, staring straight at Travis, his smoky face as impassive as a carving, his dark eyes surveying the council-room scene unemotionally as he awaited his factor's command.

"Drumming Grouse, where is my daughter?"

"Factor, she is down the shore where the brigades are camped."

"Go and tell her she is wanted at the council," directed Travis. "Fetch her here at once."

THE Cree bowsman wheeled without a word and stalked out of the doorway and across the broad veranda that extended in front of the house. Down the veranda steps he sprang and held on along the shore. It was ten o'clock at night, but over Great Playgreen Lake the Summer aurora was playing with the radiance of day.

It revealed the lake waters sparkling in barbaric glory, etched the pine-clad islands with magic needles of flame and silhouetted sharply the long lines of canoes drawn up on the landing-shore. Drumming Grouse could identify them all as he strode forward, the Grand Rapid, Nelson River, Split Lake and Beren's River brigades and, standing out huge and impressive beside the others, the governor's six-fathom craft.

Near each posed its crew, the Grand Rapid, Nelson River, Split Lake and Beren's River men, and by the governor's his famed crew of Iroquois whose skill and endurance with the paddle made wonder tales for the scores of camp-fires winking round the rocks.

Black as the silhouettes of their craft Drumming Grouse's unemotional eyes beheld the crews, showing clearly against the sheen of water and sky, moving and gesturing like gigantic animated shadows — a blazing pageant of brawn in the tapestry of the northern night.

Over and above them he discerned the girl he sought. Queen of the pageant she might have been, her fair hair glowing like a golden crown under the play of the aurora, her form wreathed in a dress of soft Summer material that shone white as an ermine robe. Drumming Grouse knew she was watching out over Great Playgreen, and he knew she watched in suspense for the return of Henderson's post runners. Silently he climbed the rock upon which she stood and came to her side.

Clara Travis did not start. Hers were the gifts of the North-born and she could sense a presence even though she heard no sound. Subconsciously she was aware that the tall lithe figure looming suddenly beside her in the

night was that of the old familiar of hers and her father's, and she did not turn her head but continued to gaze fixedly out over the jeweled waters.

Drumming Grouse's eyes followed hers and encountered a dark blotch rising and falling on the waves off toward Kettle Island. To the uninitiated it might have been a floating log or a flock of wild fowl, but the girl's trained eyes had marked it as something else, and she pointed with her finger for the Cree bowsman to verify her judgment.

"A canoe, Drumming Grouse?" she questioned.

Drumming Grouse stared, scrutinizing the blotch not for its vague outline but for its peculiar motion up and down.

"Ae, a paddled craft," he decided, "but we can not stay to see whose it is. Your father sent me to find you and fetch you to him."

"My father? Where is he?" asked Clara.

"He is still in council," the Cree told her.

"And what is the summons about, Drumming Grouse?" she demanded, trying to read his surface-lighted eyes as they climbed down to the lower shore-line.

The bowsman stalked in silence for a little way. He was not supposed to know the matters debated in council at Norway House, yet in his subtle way he did know. He pointed back over the waters of Great Playgreen where the girl had been keeping vigil, where his own eyes along with hers had marked an incoming canoe which he knew to be one of Henderson's craft.

"It is about your Free Trader they are hunting over Great Playgreen," he intimated.

The girl gave a low exclamation.

"And what do they wish of me?" she asked apprehensively.

"How would a bowsman know that?" Drumming Grouse evaded.

They were at the veranda steps when a babel of Indian dialects broke out behind them on the shore where the brigades were encamped, jangling Iroquois, lisping Ojibway, hissing Cree, and with one accord the two shot glances over their shoulders as they ascended the steps. They could glimpse the canoemen gathering at the water-line as if to meet an incoming craft, and Clara Travis realized that the canoe she had marked out in the lake must be beaching.

She gazed keenly to catch its outline as Drumming Grouse opened the door of the council room, but the crowd was too great for that. They walled the craft in. It was impossible to identify it at the moment, and the next moment Drumming Grouse led her into the council room.

Instantly the men about the council table were upon their feet, Governor Burnham bowing and greeting her with his old-world grace, the others giving her the brief unconventional salute of the North. And the marvel of it was that there was something deferential, almost apologetic, in the manners of the assembled officials.

With only themselves in grim conclave it was quite easy for Burnham to send forth a command that Clara be summoned, but with Clara here in the flesh it was quite another matter to make her the subject of an examination. For hers was the beauty that sways the grimmest of men; hers the magnetic personality that shakes the soundest judgment.

Over the company she faced lay the constraint of the feminine presence imposed on men accustomed only to contact with men, and where Governor Burnham himself would not have felt the constraint in an English drawing-room he felt it here, thousands of miles from civilization, in the council room of Norway House.

Like the other men he found himself staring at the wonder of the smooth flushed girlish face among the faces of wrinkled bronze, at the miracle of her soft, youthful eyes among the steely eyes of the wilderness-hardened post keepers. Burnham stared and could not begin framing the questions for which he had summond her, and, sensing his momentary perturbation, Clara looked inquiringly from him to her father.

"What is it, father?" she murmured.

"It is about this man Steene they are hounding over Great Playgreen," her father explained in a hard, mechanical voice. "I have just told the governor that I have had no communication with Steene and that I do not know where he might be hidden, yet he and Henderson think Steene has had communication with the other member of my family. In short, Clara, they want to know of you——"

Travis stopped short, wheeling from his place at a knocking that threatened to hammer in the council-room door. From the outside sounded a crash and a tattoo as if a man had thrown himself bodily against it in his haste and, hardly able to restrain himself from tearing it open in his impatience, was pounding with both fists.

DRUMMING GROUSE, the keeper of the door, who had closed it from the inside behind Clara Travis and waited to conduct her out again, stood by the jamb like a stone image hearing nothing till Jacob Travis, listening calculatingly, raised a hand to him.

"Open, Drumming Grouse," he ordered.

At once the Cree bowsman swung the door back, and in burst a short broad man, swarthy-skinned, black-haired, in the costume of a voyageur.

"It's my head post runner, Henri Dalmas,"

cried out Henderson, jumping to his feet. "What news, Henri? Have you found Steene?"

Scuffling in his moccasins, Dalmas was advancing at a dog-trot up the room, his volatile features trembling expressively to the tune of the words that poured from his black-mustached lips, his sparkling agate eyes talking as fast as his French-Canadian tongue, his gnarled hands, wet from the beaching of his canoe, gesturing more eloquently than either eyes or tongue.

"Ba gar, I'm ain't haunt dat Great Playgreen Lake for nothing," he answered Henderson. "I'm found heem at last, hidin' lak de rabbit in de night."

"Found him? Where?" roared Burnham in savage delight.

"On Mossy Point, de Playgreen side over dere," informed Dalmas. "Ain't more dan two an' wan half mile, mebbe t'ree mile over."

"On the Point, eh? Waiting to break for the Winnipeg side?" growled Henderson with the bay of a bloodhound that takes the scent.

"Ba *oui*, for sure. I'm sneak on hees camp."

"How many canoes has he?" asked Burnham.

"T'ree small craft," the head post runner enlightened. "Dey're too small canoes to face Lake Winnipeg wit' de wind dat's blowin' dere tonight. He be waitin' for de wind to go down ba mornin'."

"For that and one other thing," observed Burnham, his triumphant eyes holding Clara's. "But go on, Henri. How many men in those canoes?"

"Seven men, Ojibway paddlers—eight wit' heemself."

"You're sure he didn't sight you when you found his camp?"

"*Mon Dieu*, no. Henri Dalmas in de forest growth is lak de snake in de long green grass. He be dere in hees bivouac, all unconscious dat we be found heem. All you got to do is go an' surround heem."

"Then hurry up, governor, and let me handle the thing," urged Henderson. "There's just a chance of him shifting his position before morning."

"Ba gar, I be provide for dat," chuckled Dalmas. "Dere's wan beaver dam below hees camp. I be leave wan man hidden in dat dam an' wan in de canoe offshore on de Playgreen side. Eef he be move ba land or water he'll be trailed."

"Good," lauded Burnham. "Henri, there'll be a reward for you for this night's work. Now you can get off, Henderson, as fast as you like. Reenforce the brigade of canoes that is guarding the entrance of Great Playgreen Lake and move on Steene with all the rest of the canoes. Bring the Free Trader here to me. I'll send him south on the Long Traverse without arms or food."

A determined gleam filled Clara Travis' eyes as she watched the rush of Henderson, Dalmas, Barrett, Sherman, McTaggart and Corbeau from the room and she was left with Burnham and her father.

"There is no need for me to stay now, then, is there, father?" she ventured.

"No, no need, Clara," he told her bruskly.

Agile as a fawn, and without a word to Burnham, she was across the room and out on the veranda at Drumming Grouse's side. The Cree bowsman had held open the door for the outrush of men, and he closed it behind the girl.

"Ah, but you must be swift now, Drumming Grouse," she appealed impetuously. "You must reach my Free Trader on Mossy Point before they come with their canoes. You must cross over the Point and run by the land trail."

"Ae, I go," nodded Drumming Grouse. "The bonds of the Hudson's Bay Company are strong, but between you and me there are bonds yet stronger. Godfather I have been to you since you were the size of a papoose, and you I serve before all else. What is your plan?"

"He must come here to Norway House," she whispered, amazed at her own daring. "His canoes are too small to face Lake Winnipeg. We must have a large canoe, and there is only one—the governor's."

"Ae," breathed the Cree again, his dark eyes glowing with a vivid flame, "and he will take it. I go."

"Come down on Mossy Point opposite here," Clara gave him the final directions. "I shall send you a signal to cross when all is clear. Remember, Drumming Grouse, when you hear the whistle of the snipe. And don't forget Henri Dalmas' post runner in the beaver dam."

"Do not fear," muttered Drumming Grouse. "He will not hear me come. The drumming grouse does not always drum."

He was off as he spoke, stealing behind the post on the opposite side from which Henderson was hurriedly launching the brigades of canoes, creeping down to the shore-line where his own craft lay bottom up beside a clump of evergreens.

Silently he slipped it into the water and, still screened by the post, drove the craft rapidly across toward the long point of land that made of Great Playgreen a piece of landlocked water. Mossy Point thrust almost to the mainland with only a narrow entrance round its tip to the vast expanse of Lake Winnipeg.

DRUMMING GROUSE sprang ashore the moment he reached it. Out of the water and into the bushes went the canoe and the Cree was off like a deer, darting down the dark runways where only the night

before he had guided Clara to the Free Trader's camp. Steene's hiding place was on the spruce ridge just above the beaver meadow in the center of the Point, and over the dam Drumming Grouse crept as silently as a shadow.

At the farther end he could mark Henri Dalmas' post runner, half buried in the rubbish of the dam, only his head showing like the upthrust of a tree stump. His watching eyes on the ridge above him, the post runner was not aware of the stealing shadow till the Cree bowsman suddenly towered over him. Then he leaped from his burrow, but Drumming Grouse's lithe strength bore him down.

The Cree's hands were about his neck, choking back the warning he attempted to shout for the benefit of the watcher in the canoe offshore, and together they rolled in the rubbish of the beaver dam till the crackling of the sticks reached the camp on the ridge above. While he struggled Drumming Grouse could hear some one running softly in the moss of the slope, and abruptly a rifle barrel poked over the end of the dam into his face.

"Who's here?" demanded an incisive voice he recognized as Nelson Steene's. "Stand out or I'll shoot."

Drumming Grouse arose. He had forced a wad of buckskin as a gag into the post runner's mouth and knotted buckskin thongs about his wrists and ankles.

"It is Drumming Grouse and a spy of Henderson's," he announced coolly.

"They found me, then?"

"Ae, there is another spy in a canoe out yonder, and all the rest are flocking to take you. The factor's daughter sent me. Come. At Norway House there is the great canoe of the governor with which to escape."

They were climbing the ridge as Drumming Grouse explained, and from its top they caught the dark loom of canoe brigades driving over from Norway House.

"Be quick," the Cree urged. "When they round the point we can get off without being seen."

"You're right, Drumming Grouse," nodded Steene, gaging the distance of the brigades. "We must break camp like lightning."

Steene swept aside the branches where in a mossy space lighted by no camp-fire, illuminated only by the dull glow of seven Ojibway pipes, his canoemen lay with their dunnage. Luckily there was only the canopy of the green trees overhead and no canvas to pull down, and the seven pipes were pocketed and the seven Ojibways sprang into action at Steene's command.

"Take your dunnage," he directed tersely. "Shoulder the canoes and follow us."

He was down the ridge again the moment the words were out of his mouth, the foremost of his Ojibways close on him with the packs, the rearmost bobbing under the canoes.

"Be careful of the hulls," he cautioned them. "Don't spike them. Reaching Norway House depends on sound bottoms."

The Ojibway canoemen heeded his caution. With marvelous celerity they bored through the green growth, yet with a care that saved the precious birch-barks from puncture, to emerge finally at the water's edge.

"Listen," requested Drumming Grouse.

Out of the night came the whistle of the snipe.

"It is the signal to cross," interpreted the Cree. "The way is clear."

Swiftly the canoes were launched and like fantom crews they glided toward Norway House. The call of the snipe was repeated, issuing from a little cove down-channel from them, and pointing their prows for the cove they drifted in light as leaves upon the land-locked water. Drumming Grouse, first to land, darted away to the post.

In the shadows stood Clara Travis, her arms full of some strange garments, and Steene sprang out and grasped her hands impulsively.

"Why, Clara, what's this?" he whispered, fingering the garments she held.

"The governor's coat and hat," she told him. "I got them out of Norway House. He's in there with my father now, waiting till they take you."

"By Heavens, they'll never take me," declared Steene passionately. "Nor will he ever take you."

"Ah, but we must hurry," breathed the girl, thrusting the coat and hat upon him. "Quick, put them on. You must seize the big canoe on the shore, and the disguise will help. I have spoken to Drumming Grouse and he has gone to spirit provisions and equipment enough out of Norway House to fill the craft. You can get them as we go by."

Steene dropped his own leather cap on the rocks and clapped Burnham's large drooping hat of felt, decked with an osprey feather, upon his head.

Clara Travis looked into his face and with her deft fingers swept out of sight the waves of brown hair that fell over Steene's temples.

"There," she murmured, pulling the brim forward. "Let the plume fall on the left shoulder—so. No one could tell the difference. Now, the coat. Draw it close."

Steene buttoned the coat about him as they made a short détour around the post. Burnham was a big man, but the garment cut tightly into Steene's great chest and shoulders. It lacked length, too, for his tall figure, flapping well above the knees, but he knew the Iroquois canoemen would not notice it in the night. On the beach below lay the governor's huge birch-bark with the famed crew squatting beside it, their eyes staring over Great

Playgreen Lake, their tongues jangling in conversation about the chase that was going on out there.

"Lie down now," Steene directed his own Ojibway canoemen. "When they go to launch for me, make your rush. And you, Clara, be close at hand."

As if coming down from the post he himself strode boldly forward. The Iroquois turned their heads at the sound of his footsteps and, recognizing the governor's coat and hat, stood erect at salute, awaiting his word. Steene did not take the risk of speaking.

He made a motion of his hand for them to launch the big canoe, and as they stooped to obey his own Ojibways dashed upon them. Short and sharp the battle raged, Ojibways against Iroquois, but the Ojibways had the advantage of surprize. With fists and paddle blades they beat the Iroquois back from the margin so that Steene, slipping through the mêlée with Clara, seized the craft and launched it with his own hands. With an exultant laugh he lifted the girl aboard.

Then the Ojibways sprang in with them, flinging in the provisions and equipment Drumming Grouse had spirited out of Norway House, and with a flash of paddles the governor's craft was driven off the shore. The dazed Iroquois stared after it a second and gave tongue like a pack of wolves. And as if echoing and reechoing their cries other voices clamored on the night. Great Playgreen Lake reverberated with a pandemonium of sound, for the canoe brigades that had converged on Steene's camp had found it empty, and they were scouring the shores of Mossy Point hailing each other with excited shouting.

Suddenly a fresh clamor broke out on the other side of the spruce ridge.

"They've found the post runner Drumming Grouse tied up at the beaver dam," interpreted Steene.

"Then they'll all turn back at once to Norway House," breathed Clara. "We must get through the lake entrance before they can alarm the brigades that guard it."

"Yes, and Burnham can't help but hear those Iroquois yells. Ha! There he is now in the post door, and your father at his shoulder. They're running down to the shore. Listen, the governor's raging like a madman."

BY THE light of the fires that some one had fed afresh in the emergency they could see Burnham on the edge of the landing hurling condemnation on his dazed Iroquois, calling for the canoe brigades to come back from Mossy Point. Luckily the brigades guarding the lake entrance were too far away to catch his cries, and if they did hear clamor in the distance they could but attribute it to the ardor of the chase till they received a change of orders from Norway House.

So Burnham raged and bellowed for a craft to head off the Free Trader, but Steene was resolved not to be headed. Faster and faster his Ojibway crew drove the speedy birch-bark forward, bearing straight for the entrance into Lake Winnipeg. Patrolling the entrance glided a dozen small canoes, and as soon as they sighted the big craft they drew together to watch it coming.

They recognized it immediately as Governor Burnham's six-fathom craft. The Ojibway paddlers were not to be told in the night from the Iroquois, and amidships, Clara Travis sitting on the fur robes at his knees, bulked Steene, posing grimly in the governor's coat and hat.

As Steene's appropriated craft drew abreast of the patrol his Ojibway paddlers gave a wild yell in unison and raised paddle blades in salute. The guarding canoes returned the salute. Truly the Free Trader must be captured at last, for here was Governor Burnham bound out over Lake Winnipeg with his bride. With a cheer they speeded the pseudo-governor on his way, heading out over the lake in a sea that no craft but his huge six-fathom craft hitherto had weathered, in a wind that no crew but his matchless Iroquois crew hitherto had faced.

"Thank God," breathed Clara as they shot into Lake Winnipeg and caught the full force of the swell as they headed from Old Norway House Point toward Montreal Point.

"Aye, thank God, and you, and faithful Drumming Grouse," cried Steene.

He tore off the governor's coat and hat and cast them to the winds that roared overhead and settled himself with a sigh of relief beside Clara.

"It's pretty rough," he observed, "but we don't need to fight it very long. We'll put a good gap of wild sea between us and Norway House and go ashore till the wind dies down at morning."

"What's that yonder?" demanded Clara suddenly, pointing back toward the entrance to Great Playgreen Lake. "Another canoe?"

With the passing of the six-fathom craft the patrol had stood on guard again, awaiting the coming of orders from Norway House as they glided backward and forward with slow strokes under the shelter of the headlands, nor were the orders long in coming. The canoe Clara Travis had marked drove up with a gurgle and wash and the petrified patrol gazed on the real Governor Burnham, minus his coat and hat, but condemning them with a vigor that left no doubt of his personality.

"You fools. You dupes," he rated. "You let him pass in my clothes, eh? And make us dare Lake Winnipeg in small craft to catch him? After him, Sherman, McTaggart, Barrett, Corbeau."

But the post keepers of the Norway House District shook their heads and lay on their paddle blades.

"What?" roared Burnham. "You defy me? You refuse to obey your governor's orders?"

"We do not go like fools to certain death," answered Sherman, speaking for all.

"Then you'll pay for your defiance, you cowardly dogs," the governor stormed.

"A small craft will not live for five minutes in the sea that rolls on Lake Winnipeg tonight," countered Barrett. "Nobody but a madman would ask us to dare it."

"A small craft will live if the men have hearts to make it live," Burnham sneered. "Where's a craft for me? Where are my men and I'll show you. Ha! Here come my Iroquois. Here comes Henderson—a man of my own spirit."

Their paddles dipping like clockwork, Henderson drove up with his own craft into which he had bundled Burnham's crew from the beach at Norway House.

"What's the matter here?" he demanded. "Is he gone?"

"Gone," cried the governor, "and not a man will follow. They're afraid of Lake Winnipeg. Draw up beside till I board you. We'll take him ourselves."

Henderson cried a sharp command to the governor's Iroquois. With a swirl of their blades they shot Henderson's canoe up beside Sherman's craft in which the governor stood, and Burnham leaped over the gunwales.

"Now, Henderson, the gift of a factorship if you catch him," he promised.

Round them crowded all the other brigades, Barrett's of Split Lake, Sherman's of Nelson River, McTaggart's from Beren's River, Corbeau's from Grand Rapid as well as the patrolling brigade from Norway House, protesting at the attempt.

"It is madness."

"Nothing but suicide."

"What gain if you do take him? Neither of you will ever get back."

These and many more comments made a medley of fierce speeches cast over the grinding gunwales.

"Wait and see," Burnham bellowed angrily at them. "And get out of my way. Don't carry your insubordination so far as to lay a hand on this craft."

He warned them off with a paddle blade whistling about his head. His Iroquois with Henderson steering for them in the steersman's place caught their stroke and shot him out of the entrance of Great Playgreen Lake after Steene.

Before him Lake Winnipeg rolled its three hundred miles of stormy waters, and the stormiest stretch of it was that which foamed away to Montreal Point. Across the open, vast whale-backed rollers surged with a dizzy rush and broke with a roar against the rocks.

The surf was white as a South Seas beach, and for a mile offshore the lather gathered in a hissing back-wash that betrayed the tremendous force of the wind.

ONCE outside the shelter of Mossy Point, Burnham could sight his stolen canoe. Already half-way down to Montreal Point, with Steene, Clara and the Ojibway crew aboard, the great craft climbed the wave crests and shot down the tumbling slopes. He watched it poising and plunging, and suddenly he knew by the way it labored in the troughs when it went down that it was in trouble

"They've sprung a leak, Henderson," he exulted. "Look, see the way it rolls. That weight in her bottom is more than oversplash. I've ridden too many thousand miles in that craft not to know."

Henderson stared with him, all the while quartering the mighty surges with a careful paddle blade for fear one should catch them bow on.

"By the spirits of the Crees, you're right, governor," Henderson nodded. "They have a lot of water aboard. See how they're bailing. Was there a weak spot in your canoe?"

"It will be where we scraped the Turtle Rock coming in last night," guessed the Iroquois bowsman, head of the governor's crew. "We sealed it with gum only because there was no birch-bark at hand."

"I remember now," observed Burnham. "It was in the seam too. The chances are it will open wide in this swell."

"Yes, and they will all be at the bottom of Lake Winnipeg before many minutes," prophesied Henderson.

"I hope they do," growled Burnham, "all but the girl. Drive hard, men. We're gaining, and we've got to catch them to take her off."

The Iroquois bent their paddle shafts with their mighty strokes. Henderson still cunningly slanted them up the slopes of gigantic waves that towered above them and steered them through the troughs. Fortunately for them his craft was not, strictly speaking, a small craft, although it did not approach the governor's six-fathom canoe in size.

It ran a full twenty-four feet, a freight canoe of the post runners, but it was designed for inland work and lacked the curving bows and high scroll that turned the swell on big lakes. Still it fought wind and wave with marvelous success, for it was as Governor Burnham had said. Small craft could live on Lake Winnipeg even in storm if the crews had the heart to make them live.

Burnham's Iroquois crew had the heart. In

their sinewy arms reposed a skill nothing short of magical and a strength that Sherman and the other post keepers of Norway House District had not believed could exist. As long as Henderson, who knew Lake Winnipeg in all its vagaries, steered true, they could do their part.

A good deal of water was coming aboard. It splashed over the bow quarter like the regular flushing of a bucket, but, dipping unceasingly with a copper pail, Burnham himself kept the bottom clear while his crew bored on. Unless they themselves sprang a leak it seemed a certainty now that they would overhaul Steene. The gap between the two canoes was steadily lessening.

Rounding Montreal Point and bearing away for the Spider Islands lying off the mouth of the Little Black River, Steene in the big craft ahead came to the same conclusion. There was no denying that the gap between the canoes was lessening at an alarming rate.

He had moved in luck all night, but misfortune lurked for him on Lake Winnipeg, tarrying where it could do him the most harm. He had noticed the seeping of the water through the seam of the six-fathom craft from the start. It was only a few drops at first.

Through the entrance of Great Playgreen Lake it had not amounted to anything, but when they struck the cross-swells of the bigger lake the wrenching and straining of the craft began to open the seam. The great craft was taking water as fast as he could bail and the flood was ankle-deep amidships where Clara Travis crouched on the fur robes.

"The weight is beating us," Steene declared. "They're gaining, and we must do something to better this waterlogged condition."

He took one of the fur robes and folded it like a blanket, placing the fold over the rent in the bottom.

"There, kneel on that Clara, so as to hold it tight," he requested. "If we can lessen the inrush, maybe I can clear the canoe."

Quickly Clara kneeled as directed, bearing her whole weight on the folded robe to squeeze it tight against the seam, at the same time holding it with her strong white hands to keep it from shifting with the sway and roll of the craft.

"Now, Nelson," she breathed, "I think it's tightly packed. I'll try to keep it so."

At her word Steene fell to bailing with tremendous speed, his flying arms swinging in a circle from canoe gunwale to canoe bottom and back again.

"That's it," he cried exultantly as he saw the flood slowly draining under his efforts. "Hold on, Clara. I can beat it yet."

Indeed the temporary expedient of the fur robe was working well. The soaked hair clogged the seam. The tough pelt refused to strain the water through. The baffled surges snarled angrily at the damaged side. Clara Travis could feel the vicious smiting of them under her firm hands, and the elemental thrill of the battle with the forces of nature set her blood leaping.

"We'll win, Nelson," she declared. "We'll make the Spider Islands, and I'm sure the governor can't. He'll have to turn back with Henderson. Their smaller canoe can't face the waters below Montreal Point. It's rougher there than above."

"They'll face death itself," observed Steene. "They're facing it now, and so are we. But it's a thing I've faced many times before, and I hope shall face many times again before it claims me. Hold for your life, Clara. The water's still going down."

On over the wild inland sea that was blessed with the name of lake the great birch-bark sped, the Ojibways paddling with a skill that seemed to surpass the magical skill of the pursuing Iroquois behind. In their ears howled the demoniacal wind that was born in the barren grounds and roared south to ravage half a continent.

In their eyes flew the savage spray from the wave crests as the high scroll of their bows smote the assaulting surges with resounding smashes. In some mighty rhythm the great craft rocked and swung, now deep in the hollow of a wave trough that left them no glimpse of the sky, now poising on the top of a roller so near to the clouds, so it seemed, that a man could strike the stars with his paddle.

Also, it was rougher between Montreal Point and the Spider Islands. The nearer they drew to the Islands the rougher it became. The shifts of the wind commenced to pile up cross-seas that threatened to swamp even the huge six-fathom craft. Steene had it all but bailed out, but now the wrenching twisted and tore the seam under Clara's hands in spite of all her efforts to hold the fur robe in place.

It was as if the spirits in the cavern deeps of Lake Winnipeg sensed their nearness to safety and combined for one last grand charge that would tear the canoe to pieces. In poured the water, gaining, deepening, undoing all Steene's frantic work, sinking the craft lower in the swell than ever.

"By Heavens, the whole side's gone," roared Steene to the Ojibways. "Paddle like demons for the islands. Make it now or never."

MORE from habit than for benefit he could expect he went on bailing swiftly, his eyes holding the smaller canoe behind. While he had cleared the water by his expedient of the fur robe his own craft had gained, but now, terribly waterlogged, he began to lose. The vicious force of the gale smote the heavier on Burnham, Henderson and the Iroquois crew in the smaller craft, but

still it lived in the inferno of waters. Sky-high it tossed on the manes of the galloping surges. Sheer over them worked the famed Iroquois crew like fantom paddlers dipping dream blades in the fountain of the aurora that poured from on high. Steene watched their progress in a strange fascination, his hand mechanically dipping the bailer while the water crept up his buckskin leggings to his knees. Nine times while he never expected them to rise he saw them soar to the clouds in his wake. Then the tenth time they failed to appear.

A broken paddle with the steersman's streamer of wool tied to its shaft floated down on him.

"By Jove, they're gone!" Steene cried.

"Henderson's blade," breathed Clara, forgetting her own danger in that strange fascination that gripped both her and Steene. "It failed him in the end."

For an instant the cavernous trough seemed to hold the secret of their going, but the next wave crest flung Henderson's canoe bottom up against the stars.

"Aye, it failed him," nodded Steene. "The craft was flipped clean over. Look out—we're all but swamped ourselves!"

Truly their own six-fathom canoe was down almost to the gunwales.

"Another stroke," Steene shrilled. "Another stroke, and hold hard when we strike rock."

With a shout his Ojibways snatched the sinking craft from the grip of the waves with the strength of their blades. With a heave they drove its nose on the slant of the rock shore of the Spider Islands. Grimly they held it there with their straining paddles while Steene seized Clara and sprang ashore with her.

Then the Ojibways leaped themselves with a flying leap and, victors over Governor Burnham's matchless Iroquois, victors over Lake Winnipeg itself, drew the big birch-bark to safety.

Panting with their efforts, braced against the terrific gale on the shore, the Ojibways stood, staring from the long rent in the canoe bottom to the waste of tumbling waters that rolled in at their feet. Not a survivor of the governor's crew rose to their view, not even the remnants of the birch-bark craft that had dared the crossing from Old Norway House Point with them.

They glimpsed only the monstrous surges, irresistible as the ocean itself, rearing and plunging in dizzying succession, booming thunderously on the rocks, shaking the islands under their feet as if Lake Winnipeg in its baffled anger would tear away their haven.

They stared and searched each other's countenance with their dark eyes.

"So," the bowsman spoke at last, "they are all at the bottom of the lake. It is the governor takes the Long Traverse."

"Aye," nodded Steene, "Governor Burnham instead of me. And at dawn there will be another traverse for the factor's daughter and me—the long traverse to the south. Light a fire for her and another to melt pitch to mend the canoe. It must be ready at dawn, for the gale will die out with the sun."

Swiftly the Ojibways carried their battered canoe up the rocks and gathered wood for a fire. Close to the leaping flames in a nook sheltered from the lusty draft leaned Steene and Clara Travis, drying their soaked clothes in the heat.

Over a smaller blaze the Ojibways melted their resin, fitting over the long rent in the canoe bottom a carefully cut piece of birch-bark and pouring on the blazing pitch.

When it was securely sealed in place they put the craft aside, away from the fire, so that the gum might harden and present an impenetrable surface to the water.

"It is done," the bowsman reported to the two by the fire. "It will be ready by the dawn."

"That is good," commended Steen, dismissing him with a gift of tobacco. "And we shall be ready, too—shall we not, Clara?"

"Yes," sighed the girl, spreading grateful hands to the fire; "ready for the long traverse."

Coyote Jim's Code

by Robert J. Horton

Author of "Trails of Silence," "The Death Anthem at Black Mountain," etc.

DOWN a steep trail cut almost all the way in solid rock, with pine-studded slopes rising abruptly on either side, and the sun of late afternoon slanting through the timber and painting crimson spangles on the yellow boulders, "Coyote Jim" rode astride his ancient gray mare, Bluebell, on his way to Tumble Fork for the harvest ball.

Tumble Fork was a cluster of cabins about a general store and post-office, a schoolhouse and church, a restaurant and saloon—three combination institutions—and some feed corrals, between two forks of Goose Creek, in the shadow of Milestone peak.

The harvest ball was the annual mid-November blowout for that section of the Little Belts; an event attended by every prospector, forest officer, miner and timber cruiser in the high hills, and all the cowpunchers who could manage to get leave from the scattered ranches in the lowlands.

Why it was called the harvest ball none of the participants ever thought to ask; but the fact remained that there wasn't an acre of any sort of crop—except for some meadows which yielded wild hay—to be harvested within a fifty-mile radius of Milestone.

But enough of that; harvest ball it was, every year, just the same. And usually it ushered in the long, snow-ridden, bitter-cold Winter that holds the Montana mountains in an icy grip for some five months, regardless of the good intentions of the faithful Chinook winds which lave the prairies with a warm breath at frequent welcome intervals.

Coyote Jim, who had prospected for so many years that he had lost all track of them, always looked forward to the harvest ball.

Twice a year he journeyed down to Tumble Fork from the hidden recesses of the western slope of the divide behind Milestone—for the harvest ball and on Decoration Day. And these visits meant more to him than mere association with his fellow men in large numbers. They were, in reality, akin to foraging expeditions; for on these visits he secured a grubstake for the succeeding six-months' period.

Sometimes he brought in a little gold washed from the gravel of some distant stream with which to pay for his provisions; and again he overlooked this detail. For Coyote Jim despised a placer and he hated water. He was a hard-rock man; he loved the sound of a smitten drill and the smell of powder, and he was partial to stopes and never happier than when timbering a shaft or tunnel.

When he brought gold to pay for his grubstake he slammed it on the rough board counter of Henry Morton's general store with the vociferous instruction to "take all the danged stuff, Henry, and fix me up as usual. I don't know how much is there and it don't count fer it's only the leakings from a man-sized lode that's hid in solid rock where it oughter be!"

But on those trips when he brought no gold dust an element of speculation and uncertainty entered into the negotiations and unfailingly precipitated an argument between Coyote and Henry, which always had, in the past, resulted in Coyote's getting his supplies on "futures" with an admonition from Henry that he would never be so fortunate again.

To offset Henry's warning Coyote almost invariably asked for a little something extra in the way of sweetstuffs which had the effect of diverting Henry's attention from the matter of money to the marvelous gall of penniless prospectors and one such in particular—mentioning no names.

So as Coyote Jim rode down the trail on this occasion, tilting so abandoned-like in the saddle that a casual observer must surely have expected him to fall off at any moment, he grinned in anticipation, between serious thinking spells, because he was coming down without so much as a grain of gold dust.

"Broke—flat busted!" he told his old mare as he clattered across a rocky ridge and swung down into the gulch toward Goose Creek.

But it didn't seem to bother him much for soon he teetered back even more perilously and with one stirrup dangling empty began to hum and then:

"Broke, flat busted; without a bloomin' cent,
An' old man Milestone a-asking fer the rent;
Nary stick of powder, nary slice o' ham—
By gum, it's up to Henry to save the old man!"

That's what Coyote Jim sang as he rode down into Tumble Fork; his watery blue eyes glistening; his ruddy, weather-beaten face rippling in a million fine wrinkles, and his snow-white hair sticking out in wild tufts from under a battered, broad-brimmed hat, stained with sweat and powder and clay, and bearing the thumb-prints of a thousand campfire repasts.

"WELL, Henry, here we be," said Coyote Jim cheerfully as he dumped his empty pack-sacks down before the counter in Henry Morton's general store with the post-office annex.

"I see ye—I ain't blind," returned Henry in a loud voice that suggested bluster.

"Now ain't that a fine way to greet a old friend, Henry," reproved Coyote, whimsically; "I didn't say nuthin' about yore being blind."

"Of course ye didn't, ye old, frazzled mountain rat! Suppose I'll have to shake hands with ye for old times' sake."

The two shook hands; and although their grip was warm and hearty, they appeared to scowl and glare at each other; and it would have required close observation to detect the twinkle that lurked in the eyes of each.

"How's business been, Henry?" asked Coyote.

"Poor—awful poor, Coyote." Henry seemed to sigh as he shook his head. "Boys are going out of the hills fast and no new ones coming to take their place and——"

"Now hold on, you old reprobate," Coyote interrupted, shaking a long finger stubbed with callouses. "I hear that every time I come in an' you've got a bigger stock now than you ever had."

"That's 'cause I can't sell any of it—here it stays," was the rejoinder as the storekeeper included his shelves and racks in a sweeping gesture.

"Wal, now that bein' the case, I'm in a position to do you a favor," observed Coyote Jim, brightening. "I'll just take some of it off your hands."

He began tossing the empty pack-sacks over the counter.

"Fill 'em up Henry—same's I allus get in the Fall. Better put in a extra slab of salt pork this trip; looks like it's goin' to be a hard Winter—hair on the squirrels is a foot long!"

The storekeeper watched the pack-sacks come flying over the counter and when the last had landed on the heap at his feet he leaned his two fists on the counter and eyed Coyote speculatively.

"Grub's gone up," he said business-like; "how much chicken-feed did ye comb out of the creeks this summer?"

Coyote Jim appeared hurt.

"Look me in the eye, Henry; you know I ain't been foolin' with no leavings in no creek beds. I'm no water toad, I ain't; I look fer it where it belongs—in solid rock."

"You mean you're not packin' any gold poke this trip?" Henry straightened in well-feigned surprize.

"Why you old scant-measuring, short-weight'n hypocrite! You know I ain't packin' no measly gold sack any more'n I'm packin' a box of snuff."

Henry used snuff and had been on the point of taking a pinch but the prospector's remark forestalled this indulgence in his habit; and he resented it.

"Oh, that's it, eh? Well then ye probably won't want no chewing terbaccer this trip; and maybe you've threw away that evil-smelling pipe of yourn——"

"Now lookye here, Henry Morton, I'm not here to talk about chawin' terbaccer, or pipes, or gold leavings; I'm here to grub up fer the Winter an' get a box or two of powder, an' take in the town, or what there is left of it, fer a day and get back afore the snow sets in steady; an' you've got the sacks to fill so fill 'em an' don't be shootin' off any more hard-boiled conversation. I'm goin' over to the Fashion bar and caffy——"

"What ye been doing all Summer?" Henry broke in.

"I been opening up them silver-lead claims on the west slope o' Milestone and listen to me shoutin', Henry—" Coyote's eyes gleamed bright with the lights of enthusiasm— "I've got a vein as wide as yer hand already!"

"On the west slope of Milestone," jeered Henry. "An' how did ye figure on gettin' the ore down from there? Carry it down in buckets?"

"An aerial tramway!" cried Coyote triumphantly. "Just leave it to the big interests to get the ore outa there when they see what I've got. I ain't worrying nary bit, Henry."

"I suppose I'll have to wait for the pay for your grub-stake until you've sold them claims to the big interests, eh? An' furnish enough powder to blow the hull west side off Milestone in the bargain."

"Look at me, Henry—you old scallywag of a snuff-sniffin' sugar-spiller—you ain't worrying about yore pay, are you?"

"Well, I've got to be careful," said Henry uneasily and avoiding Coyote's eyes. "Things is costing powerful much these days; it ain't like it used to be."

"Now look here, Henry," said Coyote fiercely; "you know as well as I do that you got an interest in every claim I've got, you old rattlebag; an' I ain't got any four-bit claims on *my* list.

"You don't figure I've got to keep wallering aroun' in the water all Summer to wash out enough dust to pay fer a couple gunny sacks of grub, do you? Would you rather have the drippings or the hull piece of pork? You're goin' to make money outa them mica claims I turned over to you, ain't you?"

Henry started. He had forgotten the mica claims; and even as he remembered them he couldn't resist a smile. Mica! He had as much faith in mica as he had in Spanish moss as legal tender. He had taken the claims to appease Coyote's conscience as much as anything.

"'Tain't that, Coyote," he said quickly; "but maybe you'd be doing better for yourself by laying up something so ye won't have to work in your old age."

"Not work!" cried Coyote, slamming his hat on the counter. "An what would I do, Henry; what would I do?"

"Why take it easy, Coyote, just take it easy," answered Henry, shifting his glance from object to object within the crowded storeroom.

"Take it easy!" snorted Coyote. "Henry, I do believe yore gettin' childish—plumb childish. I've got these new claims to develop and sell and then—then I might travel aroun' a bit; yes." The prospector appeared wistful.

"Long time since I looked up at the hill in Butte, Henry; an' I might take it into my head to go on a little trip when I sell them claims; but I'd be right back pecking at these old hills again if I had a million. An' you'll get yore money, you old saddleback, an' you know it.

"I don't want nothing for nothing from nobody, Henry; do a good turn when I can and work and pay fer what I get—that's my code. An' you've got a half-interest in them Milestone claims right now and you know you don't need no papers to prove it by.

"Now you go right ahead and fill them sacks an' have 'em so I can light out of here bright an' early day after tommorer mornin' an'—what's that in them glass jars up there, Henry?"

"Never mind about them jars," scowled the storekeeper; "thems tidbits for ladies an' such with sweet-tooths. Marmalade ain't for no grizzled, sour old mountain-rats——"

"Marmalade! Henry, you better put in 'bout half them jars—I see you got four of them—I ain't gettin' enough sweet stuff."

"Salt pork an' beans for yours, Coyote Jim; I know all about these hill-rabbits that's afraid of the water—an' one in particular. I ain't mentioning no names, but give him something sweet an' he'd go plumb loco."

"Oh, all right, Henry; gimme a plug o' that baled hay an' prune juice you sell fer chawin' tobaccer afore I go."

Henry handed over the plug, grumbling as he did so. Then he watched Coyote with a whimsical smile and twinkling eyes in which pride and affection struggled for the mastery as the old prospector, with his big hat set jauntily on the side of his white head, swaggered out the door.

"The blusterin' old cuss," grinned Henry to himself. But his eyes continued to twinkle and his smile blossomed into a short laugh.

"His code! Why the doggoned old mountain-rat's give away every shirt he had but the one that's on his back!"

HENRY MORTON'S next customer was a swarthy man, stocky of build, whose hair showed no tinge of gray although he must have been in the early fifties. His eyes were black and beady. Once he might have been handsome, but the wild life of the hill camps had put its mark upon him.

He dropped a buckskin sack on the counter.

"Weigh'er up an' give it to me in bills," the man instructed as he took tobacco and papers from a pocket and began to fashion a cigaret.

Henry lifted his brows in genuine surprize and started to say something but instead he tipped the heavy yellow contents of the sack into his gold scales.

"Fifteen ounces—just a wee mite over, maybe," he appraised as he balanced the weights. "Three hundred dollars' worth, Elbe."

"Give it to me in twenties," said Elbe carelessly; "easier to handle."

"Want it all, Elbe?"

"Want it all? Sure I want it all. You ain't taking out any commission on gold are you, Morton? If you are, I can take it over to the Fashion an' change it; or I can spend it by the pinch."

"That's it; you'll probably spend it—" Henry hesitated. "No, I ain't taking out any commission, Elbe, only I thought may be you'd like to leave some money here an' not be packing all of it around. You're likely to get to drinking an' playin' cards during the blowout tomorrow an'——"

"An' suppose I do, Morton; ain't that my business?"

"Yes, I suppose it is," replied Henry slowly; "but there's a hard Winter just about here and you've got a family."

"Suppose I have—ain't I able to 'tend to my own business? Just give me the money for that gold, Morton, or give me the gold. I'll look out for myself, thanks, and my family, too. I know my business."

"I hope ye do," said Henry grimly as he handed over the currency. "But I know your falling, Elbe, when there's a celebration on, an' that's why I spoke."

"The trouble with you, Morton, is that you got an idear in your head that you're the guardian of this hull camp, an' the hills behind it; an' it's gettin' so a feller can't take a drink or a hand or two at stud an' come in here afterward without getting preached at—an' I, for one, won't stand for it."

Henry made no reply. This was unfair and he knew that Elbe knew it was unfair. So he remained silent; and his silence was more emphatic than words would have been under the circumstances.

Elbe bought some cigars and went out. He proceeded at once to the Fashion saloon.

Coyote Jim, walking slowly up the road, greeting acquaintances in the cabins on either side, saw him, and made as if to follow, but changed his mind and resumed his walk.

It seemed as though every one knew Coyote, and hands were waved and children cried lusty welcome to him from almost every homely abode on the pine-fringed island between the forks of Goose Creek.

From one of the cabins a girl came running with hands outstretched to greet him.

"Wal, I swan if she ain't bigger than her mother!" gasped Coyote, removing his battered hat which dropped to the ground as the girl took his hands. "An' purtier than a mountain larkspur, an' just as trim," he continued with eyes sparkling.

"Aw, Uncle Jim, you're an awful josher," said the girl.

All the young folks called him uncle.

"You're coming in for a little while, ain't you?" she invited, picking up his hat.

"Wal, just a mite of a minute, Tildy lass—just to say how-do. I got lots to 'tend to."

They entered the neat little cabin together and a woman whose hair was liberally sprinkled with gray, and whose face though showing the unmistakable signs of worry was still sweet, came to meet them.

"I knew you'd be down for the ball, Jim," said the woman quietly. "Tilda bring the fried cakes."

"Now by jimminy crickets, Lindy, if it wasn't because I allus count on a mess o' them fried cakes I'd never come down to the old ball a-tall," sang Coyote heartily. "I allus said, Lindy, that you was the best cook in these mountains."

The woman's face flushed for an instant, like an old white rose that is tinted by a fitful gleam of the sunset.

She watched Coyote quietly while he ate the doughnuts and talked about the claims he was developing, and the chance for the camp to "perk up" now that lead and silver prices had begun to soar.

And then he insisted upon going to the kitchen for a drink of water "right outa the barrel" and a "look around" and after a little he prepared to go. He shook hands with the woman and patted the young girl's head as he said:

"My but you're purty, Tildy; if you keep on you're goin' to be most as purty as yore mother was; an' you'll break half the hearts in the Little Belt mountains. Wal, good-by, Lindy."

Swinging his hat in farewell, Coyote walked slowly back to the heart of town. The great hills seemed to come closer, to approach step by step, as the shades of the twilight deepened. And as the last crimson flares died in the high western skies and the first stars came out, Coyote turned toward the blaze of light that streamed from the windows of the Fashion saloon.

A MAJORITY of the visitors who would come to Tumble Fork for the annual November festivities on the morrow had not reached town. Indeed, there were not accommodations in the little mountain hamlet for any considerable number of visitors and the prospective merrymakers knew it. They would begin to arrive early in the morning.

There would be no demand for accommodations on the following night, other than for food and refreshment and the dance floor in the schoolhouse. For a mountain ball lasts all night, after a few hours of daylight for convivial preparation on the part of the men and gossip by the women.

Therefore when Henry Morton dropped into the Fashion saloon late that night after closing his store he was not surprized to find but a handful of men in the little room with its short bar, its barrel-shaped, wood heating stove, and a few card tables, on the wall above which hung the inevitable reproduction of the painting, "Custer's Last Fight," distributed by a St. Louis brewing concern in the publicity interests of its product.

Three or four men were talking to the proprietor, who leaned upon the bar in his shirt sleeves; and Henry joined them for a glass of soda.

Suddenly he heard a familiar voice.

"Here you, barkeep, gimme me change for

'nother twenty; that son-of-a-crap-shooter's got the luck of the devil himself. I'm even scairt to let him make ch — change fer me!"

Elbe leaned heavily against the bar while his change was being counted out. Then he staggered—or seemed to stagger—toward a table in the rear under a hanging oil lamp.

Henry gasped with surprize when he saw the man who was playing cards with Elbe.

It was Coyote Jim.

Henry finished his soda and walked quietly back to look on.

The two men were playing stud and Coyote was dealing. Henry saw him tip the deck on end to straighten the cards and caught a flash of the bottom card—the ace of spades. Two cards had been dealt to each hand, the hole cards turned down, and one card face up to each. When Coyote's third card fell Henry's eyes bulged.

It was the ace of spades. Coyote had dealt to himself from the bottom!

Henry tried to rally his whirling senses. Coyote playing for money with the man Elbe—of all men! Winning the money that Elbe should be saving against the Winter's needs; and winning it by cheating.

There must be some mistake, the storekeeper argued to himself. He had doubtless been mistaken as to the card. It could not have been the ace of spades he had glimpsed on the bottom of the deck. Yes, he was mistaken; his faith in his old friend of the hills could not be shaken so easily.

Coyote raked in the money in the pot while Elbe cursed and shuffled the cards clumsily.

Coyote's left arm was on the table. When Elbe was dealing the third set of cards Henry saw Coyote shift his arm and in a twinkling the prospector had substituted a card which he had had concealed under his arm for his hole card—the one Elbe had dealt him fairly.

Henry wiped a bead of sweat from his forehead and walked unsteadily to the bar. He might be mistaken once, but twice in as many hands—never! Coyote was deliberately cheating. Doing it in bungling fashion, too. If Elbe were not so drunk he could detect the fraud in an instant. But Elbe was drunk, and there were no spectators. Coyote had it all his own way and he was getting Elbe's money fast.

In a loud voice Henry Morton ordered whiskey.

As he poured the liquor into his glass Coyote turned and gazed at him reprovingly. Henry didn't drink hard liquor as a rule; but to have Coyote, the double-dyed cheat accuse him when he, himself, was stealing another man's money——

"Have a drink, Coyote?" invited Henry with a sneer.

"Not drinking this trip, thanks," returned Coyote.

"That's right—don't let the liquor interfere with your business," answered Henry, pointedly.

There was no reply to this. Henry wondered if any of the others had noticed this nefarious thing that Coyote was up to. He was glad to see that the two men playing cards were disregarded by the others. And then he reproved himself for this satisfaction. Why should he wish to shield a thief? Did it not make him a party to the unsavory transaction?

Elbe came again to the bar.

"Las' twenty," he chortled. "Never had such a run of luck in the thirty years I been playing ca—cards in these frost-bitten mountains. Gimme a drink to change my luck, barkeep."

Henry shot a quick glance of anger and contempt at Coyote as Elbe drained the glass of liquor set before him and weaved his way back to the card-table.

Coyote had been stacking the cards in his crude way—Henry had seen him do it. Cheating! Where was Coyote's professed code now?

"Do a good turn when I can and work and pay for what I get," was what Coyote had described as his code.

And now he was doing this man Elbe a "good turn" by cheating him out of his money; getting some three hundred dollars by stealing it instead of working for it. And it was too late for Henry to stop the thing because Elbe's money was about gone. He could prove nothing. Maybe the proprietor of the place was in league with the errant prospector, for that matter.

Henry took another drink to brace his nerves against the shock they had received. Then with a grim and saddened face he went back to watch the end of the game.

Again Coyote was dealing. But as a card fell face up on his hand Elbe lunged against the table with a roar of rage.

"I saw that, you dirty ——!" he swore. "You dropped that one from the bottom!"

Coyote, surprized and much taken aback, held the deck high in the air.

"You cheated—you've been cheating!" screamed Elbe, his face purple.

"Ain't you imagining something, Elbe; ain't you seeing things, maybe?" asked Coyote softly. "Maybe that card didn't come off the bottom like you think a' tall."

"You lie!" yelled Elbe, getting to his feet. The sudden shock had sobered him. "Gimme that money."

He reached for the pile of bills and silver on the table before Coyote; but Coyote was the quicker of the two.

"Keep your hands off that, Elbe," he warned

as he gathered the money with one sweep of his hand and stowed it in a coat pocket.

"You're a dirty skunk of a card-sharp and a cheat," roared Elbe, his eyes darting red. "And I've got the medicine for the likes of you."

The others in the place who had crowded round the table drew back as Elbe's right hand went to his hip.

"Don't draw or you'll be sorry," warned Coyote in a shrill voice. "Ask Henry Morton there if he thinks there was any cheating!"

Henry started back as if he had been struck a blow in the face.

"Tell him, Henry," rang Coyote's voice; "did you see any cheating?"

Dazed with the shock of Coyote's utter brazen boldness, Henry turned toward Elbe and muttered—

"Ye don't think Coyote would cheat you, do you, Elbe?"

But Elbe wasn't looking at him nor listening to him.

"You're a skunk!" he shouted at Coyote, as his hand flashed from his hip carrying the glint of metal.

Leaping to an end of the table, Coyote threw the pack of cards into Elbe's face as three shots rang out and the pungent odor of pistol smoke filled the nostrils of the startled audience.

Coyote grappled with Elbe. Another bullet shattered the lamp overhead and the flaming oil showered upon the men. There was another shot before Coyote could knock the gun from his adversary's hand.

And then the men fought back and forth across the floor; overturning the table and chairs, dislodging the stovepipe and smashing time and again against the rocking bar.

Coyote's muscles were hard and firm from months and years of ceaseless toil in countless prospect holes that dotted the steep slopes of the high hills. And there was something in his eye, a grim, almost horrible determination in his face, that bespoke a mental stimulus which more than offset the few years' difference in the ages of the men.

When they crashed to the floor Coyote was on top. Grasping Elbe about his throat, Coyote shook him like a rat until his head rapped a tattoo on the rough pine floor.

"Dang you, it's a lesson," Coyote panted into the ear of the man beneath him. "A lesson—know what I mean—a lesson!"

Then Coyote leaped to his feet.

"Get up an' I'll give you some more, Elbe; get up—get up!"

But the spectators stepped in.

"He's had enough," said the proprietor of the saloon. "What's the matter? You act like you wanted to kill him."

Henry Morton was regarding Coyote with a strange, puzzled, sorrowful expression. Cheating a man at cards and then trying to kill him because he was detected! And heretofore Coyote had always been square. And he had kept the money. It was the last straw in a friendship such as only the West can cement.

Elbe was limping painfully toward the door.

"Just a minute, Elbe," rang Coyote's voice. "Here's yore gun—only I'm goin' to keep it through the doings tomorrer; and if you come in here I'll kill you sure as shooting. I'll be a-waiting."

For a moment Elbe stood undecided looking into Coyote's eyes; then without a word in reply he turned and went out into the night.

ALL the day of the harvest ball Coyote Jim sat in an old armchair at a window of the Fashion saloon, greeting acquaintances, observing newcomers whom he did not know, watching both front and rear doors, and staring moodily at the vivid splotches of Indian Summer color in the valley below the green of the everlasting pines. But one for whom he seemed to be watching did not come.

And when the moon had crept up above the high-flung ridges and the hour past midnight brought the climax of convivial merry-making, he laid down upon a pile of sacks in a back room for a few hours of rest.

Early in the morning of the next day he was at the rear of Henry Morton's store with his horses. Silently he carried out the bulging pack-sacks and burdened his pack-animals with the supplies. Henry spoke no greeting; nor did he allow his glance to meet Coyote's except once—in severe and silent accusation.

When Coyote had finished his preparations for departure he laid a gun upon the counter. Then from inside his shirt he took an oilskin packet, opened it and laid an envelope beside the weapon.

"There's Elbe's gun, Henry; see that he gets it. An' you look after that there envelope yourself. I'll be goin' back to Milestone now."

He hesitated, as if waiting for Henry's customary blustering farewell. But no words came from Henry's mouth and Coyote left.

Henry looked at the envelope as if it were a coiled rattler. He was being paid with Coyote's ill-gotten gains. He wouldn't take it!

As the rear door closed on the back of the prospector, Elbe entered by the front way.

"Here's your gun, Elbe," said Henry shortly.

"Good thing I didn't have it yesterday," snarled Elbe. "I tried to borrow one, but not a man would do it. Sick as I was I'd got that crazy rat and I'll get him yet! Suppose he thought he was entitled to get that money——"

"If he hadn't got it somebody else would 'ave," Henry broke in—not in defense of Coyote Jim but in disapproval of Elbe.

"Maybe they would an' maybe they wouldn't," said Elbe in surly tones. "Maybe

I'd a had a chance with somebody that wasn't a —— cheat. Suppose he thought he was entitled to get it back anyway he could since he paid it to me—the skunk."

"Paid it to you—that gold!" exclaimed Henry. "Ye say Coyote paid you that gold?"

"That's what I said. Paid it to me for two months of hard work doing the assessment work on the mica claims."

"Mica claims?" said the bewildered Henry.

"Sure, mica—poor man's glass. Four claims down below Rumbling Gulch."

"But those claims—he turned them over to me."

"Maybe he did; but he doesn't think you've got much faith in 'em, Morton; or else he's tryin' to steal 'em back. I opened up sheets of mica there four feet square and clear as crystal most. He said something about the forest ranger sayin' as how parties looking for mica was coming up here in the Spring."

"But they're in my name," protested Henry; "they're——"

And then a great light broke over his face. Coyote had said that he, Henry, didn't have much faith in them—parties looking for mica—the claims were Henry's absolutely—he couldn't possibly lose them now that the assessment work was done, whereas if it hadn't——

"Elbe," said Henry sharply; "where did Coyote get that gold?"

"Washed it out of some creek, I suppose, an' I'm goin' to get it back if I have to——"

"Shut up!" roared Henry, who had ripped open the envelope Coyote had left with him and was holding a roll of bills and a slip of paper. He scanned the penciled characters:

> See that Elbe gits credit for this three hundred for supplies for his family and Xmas presents. I had to git it before somebody else did.

"Read that!" shouted Henry tossing the slip of paper to Elbe. "Coyote saw ye was goin' on a tear and he did ye the best turn ye ever had done in your life. You've got three hundred credit for supplies here an' Elbe if that don't teach ye a lesson by —— I will!"

The excited storekeeper was throwing something into a gunny sack as he spoke. He pushed Elbe into the street, locked the door, and with the sack over his shoulder ran toward the Fashion.

"Saving the mica claims for me, an' saving Elbe's money for his family; an' me thinking——"

There was a moisture in Henry's eyes as he threw open the door of the Fashion.

"Hey!" he called. "I'm going to borrer one of these horses for awhile an' when I get back I'll pay whoever owns it for the use of it."

He slammed the door shut, untied one of the horses at the hitching-rail before the saloon, tightened the cinch, mounted and dashed toward the Milestone trail.

In less than two miles—just where the trail turns into the hills from Goose Creek—he came upon Coyote Jim, who had dismounted beside the stream and now was tying a white bandage about his left forearm.

"Say, ye old mountain-rat, why don't you get all your stuff before you go shamble-footin' off into the mountains!" sang Henry with his old farewell bluster. Then he saw the bandage.

"Did he bore you, Coyote?" he whispered.

"Just a scratch now, Henry; I've done worse with a ragged drill-head. Washed it out an' it's all right."

"Are ye sure?" insisted Henry.

"Just a little nick on the arm with clean lead. You just mind yore own business, Henry; what you chasin' up here for?"

For answer Henry lowered the gunny sack and Coyote Jim peered inside. Then he glared at Henry and Henry glared back. The kind of a glare that old, old friends will register to conceal their real feelings, when those same feelings are not being concealed at all.

"Why, you old skinflint," accused Coyote, "I cain't be packin' no glassware aroun' an' you know it."

"Tie them cans of marmalade on the back of your saddle," thundered Henry; "an' don't give me no back-talk. Coyote, I always did have a sneaking idear that the mica claims would pan out; I just hadn't been able to give 'em any attention—been so busy."

This guiltily. And then—

"Coyote, that was a good turn ye did for Elbe, although I didn't know it at the time."

"Henry, I don't think no more of Elbe than I love a timber wolf, but——"

"I understand," said Henry in a soft voice.

AGAIN the sunset was touching the white peaks with crimson. Coyote halted his little pack-train on the rocky crest of the main divide and pulling his hat down to shade his eyes stared across the timbered ranges.

But, in reality, he wasn't looking at the virgin stands of pine and fir, but back across the years. Just as the dying day was unfurling its glorious banners in the West, so for a brief moment the veil of the past was lifted in Coyote's mind.

"Bluebells, old hoss, we could have had her," he said querulously, fondly twisting an ear of his ancient saddle mare. "We could have had Lindy Elbe if we'd had the nerve to ask her! An' just because we didn't get her is no sign we can't look out for her just the same. C'mon, c'mon, Bluebells, we gotta get to Milestone afore dark."

The Devil A Man Would Be

by G. A. Wells

IT CATCHES your eye and arouses your curiosity, does it? Quite so, sir. Yes, there is a tale behind it, and if you're willing I'll tell it. But it's far too hot to spin yarns here in this smelly messroom. How about going outside?

Ah, but here's a fine place in the eyes under the awning where we can catch the cool breeze and cheat the sun. You take the bit-head, sir, and I'll up-end this bucket for myself.

A cigar? Yes, and thank you. I have a pipe that is a good friend, sir, and now I'll rest him and have a cigar.

Now about that thing you saw back there in the messroom. There was once a fellow by the name of Edward Jackson in the crew of this ship. The ship's company knew him as "Devil" Jackson. A strange name, yes; but it seemed to fit, for a devil he was. But I'll tell the story and you be the judge of him yourself.

It happened something beyond three years ago. This little *Yankton* we're on now was the boat, and how long she's been serving tender to the fleet I don't know. A trim little vessel, as you can well see, and a neat home for her full complement of two officers and fifty-four men.

I was wearing two enlistment stripes and a first-class quartermaster's rating when I shouldered my dunnage aboard her at the Norfolk Navy Yard where she was in dry-dock for a scraping.

A month after I came aboard the skipper got orders to take on eight court-martial prisoners and haul them up to Portsmouth Naval Prison. They came aboard the morning we sailed, and some of us stood beside the after gangway and watched them come on. As I recall it they were ironed together two and two, with three marines and a sergeant to guard them on the way.

This Devil Jackson was one of the lot. Two months before he had been court-martialed from this very *Yankton* for some serious offense. and had been laying it out in the bull-pen aboard the station ship.

I'd known Devil Jackson before that through having served with him on the old *Iowa*. Him and his ways I knew well. I was not surprized to see him with the irons on his wrist and prison ahead of him. I often wondered how he escaped prison so long. If ever a man deserved to be put away from his mates he did. A bad man he was.

They called him incorrigible. He was the sort who'd rather do a man dirt than eat a good meal. It was an insult to any man to call him shipmate. That bad, you see.

Steal? He stole for the love of it when he didn't have any earthly use for what he stole. It was in his blood to steal.

He'd get drunk too, when he could jump ship and get ashore long enough to get liquor, which wasn't often. It was said the truth was never on his lips from one day to another, and a fouler-mouthed man never drew breath. He'd curse God for the sake of blasphemy.

He loved a fight too, and provoked them time and again without just cause. Not with his equals. No. Always with the weaklings and youngsters who'd go down under his hard fists like hammer-struck oxen. Brutal as a red savage, understand.

Of course he got a good many beatings from men who took up for the weaklings. I myself gave him a go once just for luck. Yet nothing seemed to hurt him. He could stand up under any kind of punishment, and I'll give him credit that never once did he cry quits when he got the worst of it. He'd get up to be knocked down again and laugh in your face, and nary an inch would he give to any man. Tough as leather.

Once, if memory is not amiss, he knifed a man in the back in the dark. That's the supposition. Nobody saw him do it, not even the man he knifed; Devil himself denied it.

It was taken for granted it was him, because nobody else aboard was dirty enough for the trick. So they called him up before court

martial and gave him sixty days in the bull-pen. General principles, I think.

I couldn't begin to tell you what sort he was. If there was a grain of good in his whole body it had never come to light up to the time I'm telling you about. Somebody called him Devil, and that's the name he died with. Let me tell you he was no coward, with all his badness.

"Hullo, Daniel Wetmore," he sings out to me that morning he came aboard shackled to another man. "Shipmates again, eh?"

I gave him a black look and he grinned at me like a monkey. It hurt to the bones to be called shipmates by such as him.

"Have it as you want it, Daniel," he says. "A man's a right to choose his friends as he will. I remember a beatin' you give me once, boy, an' I'm here to thank you for it. No hard feelin's, eh?" he says.

He grinned again and I saw he was making fun of me.

"I have no jail-bird friends," I says before I could stop.

He grinned again harder than ever and winked at me.

"Am I a jail-bird, Daniel?" he says. "Yes; that's right. Eight long years they give me this time, friend of mine."

"Pipe down and go along, you!" chimed in the sergeant of the marine guard, giving him a push that made the irons clank.

The eight of them were herded forward to the bull-pens to be locked away for the trip. The brigs, that is, sir.

TWO hours later we were passing the capes for the open sea, and a little later still dropped land over the stern and headed north a bit east. We had a clear sky and a smooth sea, with the promise of a clean trip all the way. Still, you can't always tell about the sea; it's tricky. Before ever we came to Portsmouth we had it good.

Pleasant weather we had up to the Jersey coast; then the barometer took a sudden drop. The wind came out of the nor'east pretty stiff, and before long the sea was making. Our head began to splash, and now and then she'd dip a rail under till she was almost awash. I'd heard the *Yankton* was a good sea boat.

But the farther north we went the worse it got. Worse and worse it grew, the sea running riot and the wind coming great guns. Man alive, how it did blow! Did I mention it was cold weather? No? It was. The spray would freeze no sooner it struck, covering the deck and rigging with a coat of slick ice that made getting about unhandy for the watch on deck.

As you can see for yourself, sir, the old girl isn't as big as a minute. Seaworthy she is, but a cork on the water when it's rough. The big seas picked her up and slammed her about any way, and while she answered her wheel ready enough she'd yaw wide now and again and have to be coaxed back to the course like a contrary woman.

It was so bad by the time we breasted Nantucket we had an idea maybe the skipper would call it a day and run in somewhere and drop a hook till the weather moderated. I tell you it was no joke to be out in a heavy sea in such season aboard this little boat.

But that skipper we had was a driver; fair weather or foul, blow high or low, he was one to hustle to his ultimate port against any odds. And this port we were headed for was a good many miles farther north yet, across some mighty dirty water, with ugly Cape Cod and its shoals aport.

By Nantucket we went, past Siasconset and Great Point Neck where there was fair anchorage, the little girl plunging in and out again like a spaniel in a duck-pond. Sometimes she'd come up terrible slow and you'd think maybe she wasn't coming up at all. I swear I saw her bury the tips of her signal-yard under when we lay on our beams.

Come Monomoy Light and we were standing first on our stern and then on the stem, wallowing far over abeam and shipping seas till it looked like the whole Atlantic Ocean was aboard and trying to choke itself down our tiny scuppers. There was no going on deck, which was soon swept bare of everything that wasn't bolted tight down.

Then along about sundown before you could snap your fingers almost, the wind veered and came from the east, direct onshore. A westward gale with Cape Cod for a lee shore is something to consider. We'd been hugging land all the way up like small boats do, and we weren't any too far out for comfort. A sudden break in the engine or a snap of an anchor-chain meant the end of us.

"Ever see the likes of it, Dan?" the carpenter says to me that evening at mess.

"Not on a boat this size," I says. "Maybe the old man'll take a fool notion to put in somewheres by and by."

"We're taking a long shot on seeing Portsmouth if he don't," the carpenter says. "Lots of shoals along here, ain't there, Dan?"

"Miles of them," I replied.

When we came up to Nausett the skipper guessed it was a little hard on the engine to have her screw racing like a whirligig and we'd better stick her into a little hole of a place he knew about along there and ride it out at anchor.

So we ran her into this place he knew about and dropped our starboard anchor, the best one we had, and let out eighty fathoms of chain to give her plenty of swinging room. But I couldn't see that place was much better than outside; it was wide open in front. The only advantage it gave us was we were riding

head-on to the seas and the engine wasn't racking itself to pieces.

That little girl was a wild one, I'll tell you. She pulled and tugged and strained like everything to break her cable and pile herself up ashore.

I could see the skipper was doing some tall thinking about this time; he had a worried look. I bet right down in his heart he wished he'd got inside somewheres sooner. He'd played too long outside, then had to take what was handy. We were up against a stiff game with the cards running against us.

"No watches on deck tonight, of course," he says when the anchor was down. "But I want every man to keep his clothes on and be ready to jump in case she starts to drag. Boatswain, detail two men with each quartermaster for bridge lookout and have them relieved every half-hour. Cook, make up a big pot of hot coffee and break out bread."

The boatswain was second in command. He told off two men to me and two to Bill Hanson, the other quartermaster. No sleep for me that night, I figured. It didn't matter I had half-hour watches, though; a man would have a fine chance to pound his ear with his hammock swinging and twisting like a leaf in a cyclone.

Hanson and his two men drew the first bridge watch and fought their way up to the bridge. Me and my two men sat down on deck and braced our backs against the bulkhead and got out our pipes.

Up above the wind was howling and screaming, and the big seas were slapping her sides and thundering down on deck to make a noise like the roar of a big gun. Sometimes she rolled so far over the deck seemed to stand on edge; then we'd have to grab root or go sliding away on the seat of our pants. Walk? Not much; we had to crawl. Heaven save me from a little ship in a big sea.

THAT half-hour below passed all too quick to suit me; but it did pass, and me and my two men pulled on our oilskins and mitts and went up the forward hatch. It was fearful up there on deck. Dark as pitch, cold as ice, with the wind and sea fighting like demons to see which one could suck us up and heave us overboard.

"How goes it, Bill?" I says when the three of us finally made the bridge.

The wind was howling and screaming so he didn't hear me, and I put my mouth to his ear and said it again.

"The wind's done blowed all the stars out of the sky," he yelled back. "Barometer's fallin' an' the sea still on the make."

"Anchor holding all right?" I screamed.

"Think so, though you'd better watch 'er; thought I felt her dragging a couple of times."

He went below with his men and left us with the watch. No use trying to tell you what it was like there on the bridge; you'd have to go through it to understand. People who live ashore don't know what a real storm is.

As you can see for yourself, sir, her freeboard ain't very high. The floor of the bridge is only twenty-three feet above water-line. A sea like was running that night makes a fool of her. If her forecastle was clear of water a full minute hand running I didn't see it. Down there the sea was boiling and foaming, groaning and grunting to beat everything.

It wasn't spray that came flying over the bridge now like it had been that afternoon. It was solid sheets of water, and when it hit it was freezing cold. We weren't on the bridge five minutes before we were soaked to the skin, even through our oilskins, and caked with ice.

We couldn't talk, we couldn't smoke, we couldn't walk, nor we couldn't even chew tobacco on account of spitting. We couldn't do anything but get a grip on something and hold tight, keeping alert for a dragging anchor. —— only knows how she held on with all that pounding.

And so it went, half an hour on the bridge freezing stiff with the bitter cold and half an hour below in the engine-room thawing out again, with mugs of steaming hot coffee warming the insides of us.

By midnight it was worse than ever, though you'd think it couldn't get any worse. The loose gear on the lower decks was rattling around like cans in a crate. The coal in the bunkers was having conniption fits. Dishes fell out of the racks in the galley and smashed. Pots, pans and kettles broke their moorings and crashed and banged.

At first the forward hatch was hooded with double-ought duck, strong as a bull's hide, but the heavy seas pounding down on it split it wide open after a while, and now the seas came cascading down the ladder till the berth-deck was running ankle-deep with water.

"Benson," the skipper said to the marine sergeant in charge of the prisoners when we were getting ready to take a turn on the bridge, "I think you'd better release your men and give them the run of the ship. They're not likely to run away tonight."

He tried to laugh at his joke, but it fell flat. That wasn't any time to laugh. Our skipper was grit clear through; he was a good one. But he better than anybody else realized that we had overlooked the play.

He didn't say why the prisoners should be released, though that was an easy guess. If anything happened we had a bare chance. With the irons on them the prisoners wouldn't have the ghost of a show. The skipper wanted everybody to have the same chance, you see, little as it was.

With the wind blowing ninety or a hundred

miles an hour onshore and piling up the surf mountain high the man who got through could call himself lucky.

When I came below that time I told the skipper I thought she was dragging the least bit, though I wasn't sure. He said he'd go up with us next time and have a look for himself.

Well, it seems like she was just waiting for the skipper to come up, because we hadn't been on the bridge ten minutes when she began to drift shoreward, dragging that heavy three-ton anchor with her. There wasn't any mistake about it. Of course we couldn't see anything, but feeling was another matter.

When the wind lulled the least bit or when the seas loitered a mite she'd slack her chain; then she'd jerk back with a rush and the chain would go taut. She wouldn't stop with a taut chain, though; she'd keep going a bit more, say a dozen feet.

Suppose she done that trick eight or ten times a minute; it wouldn't take her a thousand years to get ashore on the shoals. There wasn't much grip for the flukes of the anchor, you see, on account of a sandy bottom. It takes good rock bottom to hold an anchored ship steady in a heavy sea.

THE skipper snapped on a little searchlight amidship against the forward bridge rail, and by its light I saw his lips tight together. He poked about in a locker and pulled out a ten-pound lead-line and handed it to me.

"Wetmore, see if you can get out there on the end of the bridge," he cried, his lips in my ear. "Heave the lead until I tell you to stop. When you read your mark hold up your fingers to say how many fathoms you get. I'll turn the light that way."

He gave me the beam of light across the port wing of the bridge and I started out, holding to the rails and stanchions for my life. The wind was so strong it blew that heavy sounding-lead out from my body like it was made of wood.

It was a man's job to get out there to the end of the bridge, and it was a man's job to stay there when I reached it. I was waist deep in water sometimes when an extra big sea swept over us. I lashed myself to the bridge rail with the free end of the lead-line and began to heave.

The first mark I read, and a job it was, showed eighteen fathoms. I held up my hand three times, then showed only three fingers. The skipper nodded and I heaved again. I got eighteen that time, too, and again after that. Then I got sixteen right on the jump. I saw the skipper's lips move when I gave him the signal for sixteen.

For fifteen or twenty minutes longer I kept heaving the lead, getting less and less all the time. It was plain as the nose on your face that we were dragging, and if the lead-line wasn't lying we were dragging faster than we should.

Presently I got ten fathoms. You'd imagine maybe there wasn't anything in that to worry a man, seeing that ten fathoms is sixty feet shore measure and the little girl drew only twenty-one feet. Yet there wasn't any way telling how far she'd drag before she stopped, and then she might be stopped by hitting bottom.

I gave the skipper the signal for the last mark of ten fathoms and he called me in.

"Bad, sir," I says when I got to his side.

"It's run or go ashore, Wetmore," he says.

"We've got another anchor, sir," I suggested.

"Nothing but a kedge," he replied. "Besides, the chains might get snarled and we'd be worse off than ever. No, we've got to slip our chain and run. —— only knows if we'll live through that mess outside, but we've got to take a chance. We can't stay here, that's sure."

We couldn't for a fact, sir. Our chances of beating out of there against that wind and sea were about one in five, and that wasn't much of a chance. But if we stayed where we were we'd go ashore. There was a steady roaring dead astern that told us what sort of surf was running, and it couldn't have been more than half a mile away.

The skipper swung the searchlight to take in the forecastle. I've seen some wild seas in my time, sir, but I'd never seen one as wild and ugly as that one. There wasn't any forecastle; just a smother of boiling water. When I saw that I wondered how we were going to slip our chain.

We only had a hundred and ten fathoms of chain all told. There was a shackle at forty fathoms from the anchor and another at eighty-five fathoms. Two shackles were all we had. We had out a few feet better than eighty fathoms. The only shackle we had aboard was the one out there on the forecastle buried under water.

I didn't believe any man alive could go out there and live in that hell of roaring black water long enough to knock the pin out of the shackle and let the chain slip.

"There ought to be a shackle down there somewhere, sir," I yelled in the skipper's ear, pointing at the flood below us.

"—— luck!" he roared back. "We'll have to unfasten the bitter-end from the holding-bolt in the chain-locker and let the whole works go."

"It's bolted into the frame, sir," I told him.

"Don't make any difference; we've got to get it loose some way or we're done," he answered.

"Needs must when the devil drives," I said.

He didn't hear me and wheeled to the tubes

on the rail behind him and whistled the engine-room.

"Miller?" he screeched down the tube when the engineer answered. "You fellows stand by down there with a full head of steam. We're dragging like fury and have got to get out of here in half an hour or go ashore. Get her good and hot, Miller; we'll need every ounce of steam you can pour into her. Watch your signals close."

Just as he turned away from the tube somebody came jumping up the bridge ladder, a big sea right on his heels. It was this Devil Jackson I told you about, a man on his way to Portsmouth Naval Prison to serve an eight-year term at hard labor.

"I've restored myself to duty for the time, sir, an' I'll do anything I can," he yelled at the skipper.

The skipper curled his lip.

"You're a prisoner aboard this ship, Jackson, and a prisoner you'll stay as long as you're aboard," the skipper says. "I got enough real men to do what I want done. You get below and stay there."

He brushed past Jackson and went stumbling down the ladder and was lost in the darkness. Jackson lurched over beside me.

"This old tub's in a —— of a tight hole, Daniel," he said, holding to my arm. "What's his nibs goin' to do to get her out, eh?"

Well, there we were all in the same boat so to speak, and as Jackson truly said in a tight hole. At a time like that when you don't know how much longer you've got to live you haven't got it in you to hold any man a grudge. Bad as Jackson was I felt sorry for him; if we had to go he'd have a lot more to answer for than me.

"We're going to run for it, Devil, the Lord willing," I says. "The old man's gone below to see about slipping the bitter-end in the locker."

"Don't the —— fool know it'll take an hour to get that chain away from that three-inch holding-bolt!" he snapped. "This old barge will be splinters on the beach before they can get that chain loose. There's a shackle out there on the forecastle if I know the length of that chain. Whyn't he send a man down there to knock the pin out?"

"The devil take you, man! It can't be done," I says.

He stood there looking down at the foaming forecastle for a minute or so.

"The devil take me, Daniel! But it might be done," he says.

He left me and went down the ladder. I clung to the rail where I was, me and my two men, looking down at the spinning water on the forecastle by the light of the searchlight. It fascinated me. I'd never seen anything like it before, and I never want to again. It was a sight to make you shiver.

ABOUT ten minutes passed. That roaring sound astern, plain as plain could be to the ears now, was getting louder and louder all the time. It was the wicked surf crying for us. Half an hour the skipper allowed to get the end of the chain away from the holding-bolt. It wasn't very hopeful.

Once I imagined I felt the little girl bump when she fell down in the deep hollow between two seas, and she might have hit bottom. That was to be expected, what with the continual dragging of the anchor through the loose sand.

So we stood there watching and waiting, beating first one hand and then the other against the bridge rail to knock off the ice and keep them warm. Then the skipper came up on the bridge where he'd be ready and said he'd set the blacksmith to work cold-chiseling the holding-bolt in the chain locker.

"It's nip and tuck whether we win or lose, Wetmore," he yelled into my ear. "Lose, I think. We'd better have some headway to help out."

He whistled the engine-room again and asked how it was with them down there. They were ready, so he gave the signal for half speed ahead. The chain slacked a little, but not much. Which went to show that even with full speed ahead we wouldn't make more than two knots an hour, if that. Maybe nothing at all if the sea was worse outside than it was there.

The sea ran out from under her and she struck something that jarred us.

"Bottom, sir," I says.

But the skipper paid me no attention. He was leaning over the forward bridge rail staring down at the forecastle with popping eyes. I looked where he was looking, and there was a man, on hands and knees, crawling out along that raging forecastle toward the eyes here where we're sitting this minute.

"Hey, you fool, get back there!" I screamed at him through my cupped hands.

I felt the skipper's hand tight on my arm and looked at him.

"It's Jackson," he says. "He's got one chance in a thousand."

Yes, it was this Devil Jackson, the man with an eight-year term in prison hanging over his head. He had two heavy grate-bars fastened to his middle and a pair of lead-soled diver's shoes on his feet. There was a hammer in one hand and a chisel in the other. Weight, you understand, to help him against the pull of the seas that washed over him.

We watched him and said nothing. Watched him crawl inch by inch along that smothered deck, dodging the seas, flattening himself when they came. As each one buried him we waited anxiously for it to clear, wondering if he'd be there yet. And he was, which goes to show that there is a God who can keep a man alive against impossible odds.

He came to the chain and began to drag himself along by it, feeling with his hands for the shackle, for he must have been blind with the water in his eyes. He found the shackle a foot or so inboard just before the chain pitched out the hawse-pipe. He went to work with his hammer and chisel, his legs twisted around the chain. A devilish big sea broke above him and fell like thunder.

We waited, held our breath, clinching our numb fingers into the iron piping of the bridge rail, praying. The water rolled away and there he was gasping for breath, his hands hammering at the shackle-pin. The surf behind us roared in our ears, and the little girl bumped again and again. The forecastle lifted high and spilled the tons of water aft, and just then Devil Jackson drove the pin from the shackle and the chain rattled out through the hawse-pipe and we were free to run.

Another sea came, bigger than ever, sweeping in over the port bow. It buried everything from sight, churned and swirled a few moments, then slipped over the starboard side. And sliding with it was this man I'm telling you about, Devil Jackson. He threw up one hand and laughed back at us and was gone, the diver's shoes and the grate-bars pulling him down.

The skipper gave her full speed ahead, so here am I and here is the little *Yankton* to show that a man can be a man. And that tablet you saw against the bulkhead in the messroom; the boys took up a collection and there it is. Another cigar? Thank you, sir.

A PAL

by Percy W. Reynolds

WHAT constitutes a pal?
I'll tell you, Jack,
It's more than slapping on the back
Or throwing con;
It's even more than giving cash
To some old friend who's gone to smash—
Much more than that.
It's just the great big-hearted trick
Of knowing how and when to stick;
Of doing what you can to serve
The other guy who's lost his nerve.
It's acting friendly-like and fair,
And always dealing straight and square.
It's living up to life's big plan
And being something like a man—
Dead on the level, honest, true.
A pal's a man; thank God, like you.

THE CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THIS is where I catch it hard. Quite a lot of you lambasted me for printing one of Talbot Mundy's stories in *Romance* instead of in *Adventure*. The funny part of it is that some of you also lambasted me for printing any of Mr. Mundy's stories in *Adventure*. One of you wrote that he always tore out a Mundy story before beginning to read a copy of *Adventure*. (I tell this because I know Mr. Mundy well enough to know he'll only chuckle when he reads it.) In other words, I'm damned if I do and damned if I don't. Can't possibly suit all of you. Best I can do is to let you take turns in cussing me.

And there's another similar predicament in this matter of using Mr. Mundy's story in *Romance*. *Adventure* has always printed some stories with some women and some love-interest in them, but it's never let the love-interest be the first interest and it has always made a point of having part of the stories in each issue entirely free from any love-interest. During the past year some of you wrote in complaining because, they said, there was getting to be too much love-interest in the book. (One —— fool even indulged in idiotic speculations as to my personal affairs on the theory that they were the cause of the change. He figured I'd fallen in love. Just as another —— fool once figured I was a woman-hater and hardened cynic because there wasn't enough soft stuff in the magazine to suit him. Please note this—Whatever my personal feelings and affairs happen to be, any time I get to editing the magazine according to them I'll lose my job and be fully entitled to lose it. I've managed to hang on as an editor for some twenty years and, whatever other mistakes I've made, I haven't made *that* one.)

WELL, to go back, quite a number of you complained that there was getting to be too much love-interest in the magazine. We here in the office talked it over. Hadn't noticed it ourselves, but, if that many readers had, it was time we did. (Incidentally, the others concerned don't choose stories according to the thermometer of their personal hearts any

more than I do.) Going back over the magazine we couldn't notice any marked change but there did seem to be fewer of the rough-and-ready kind than before and, whatever happens, we want to keep *Adventure* primarily a man's magazine.

Stories have a tricky way with them. No one has ever been able to explain why they run in streaks and bunches. Why, do you suppose, do Latin-American stories, for example, come in in large number for a year or two, then stop suddenly and come scarcely at all for a year or two? For several years we scoured around hard for snow country stories and could get almost none. Then for three or four years more came than we could use. For the past year or two they've been scarce again. Same kind of thing holds for sea stories, detective stories, mining stories, all kinds of stories except bad stories. And every time some particular kind of story gets plentiful or scarce in the magazine, somebody writes in and cusses the editor and accuses him of taking bribes, being a fool, cutting throats, or something like that. Take my advice, consider a long time before you become an editor!

WELL, we office people mean well enough in spite of the fact that there are thousands and thousands of readers who can do the job a whole lot better than we can. "All right," said we, "if there are even symptoms of the stories running too much to the love-interest, we'll get right on the job of changing things. It'll take quite a while before the change can show in the magazine, but we're now on our way."

One of the things we did was to take out of *Adventure's* inventory a few stories with strong women-interest or love interest and transfer them to *Romance*, which has no objection to them. Among them was Talbot Mundy's story, though the time element also figured here, for reasons over which we had no control, and *Romance* could use it sooner that *Adventure*. And now comes along comrade Irwin and clubs me over the head for doing it. Some of you fellows who kicked about too many love-interest stories in *Adventure*, it's really up to you to step forward and take care of comrade Irwin.

Here's his letter:

Philadelphia.

You are now going to hear some "Honest to God" criticism.

YOU have been disloyal to your trust. You have been absolutely dishonest with the many old, tried and true friends of *Adventure*. You have robbed the readers and subscribers of *Adventure* of that which belonged to them just as much and as sure as though you sneaked in the night and stole their birthright.

Adventure does not belong to you or the management of the Ridgway Company; it belongs to the thousands of subscribers, old and new.

When you announced the coming of *Romance* we rejoiced with you and wished you success. Yes, we the band of loyal friends joined with you in pulling for the young brother, but we never imagined for one single minute that you would rob *Adventure* to promote *Romance*.

YOU stole Mundy, Conrad, Buck, Young and others—deliberately stole them. *Monty* and his friends belong to *Adventure*. You know it and we know it. Oh; but you have raised —— among your friends of *Adventure*, and that is not all. You are numbers behind in *Adventure*. You present difficulties, paper-shortage, strikes, transportation etc., but your *Romance* is on the book stands and we old *Adventure* readers can go hook and wait.

I dare you to publish this as it stands and invite a fair and just criticism. The shadow for the substance—it's pitiable.

Don't misunderstand me. I buy and read *Romance*, but for goodness' sake let it stand on its own bottom, live or die on its own merit, don't rob the readers, the "Old-Timers," the people that made *Adventure* such a success.—W. Y. IRWIN.

INCIDENTALLY, I don't see anything very "daring" in publishing his letter. I don't think he has much of a case, and, if he has, I'm willing to take my medicine. Only it would be a whole lot easier for me if all the doctors agreed on the same treatment instead of contradicting one another.

Conrad, for example, never appeared in *Adventure*. Consequently I didn't steal him from there. Nor has Buck been in *Adventure* since its earliest years. And Mundy, Young and "others"—does friend Irwin think we don't "allow" our writers to appear in other magazines, even those not published by other houses? True, some of them are distinctly identified with *Adventure*, but I'm proud to say that the identification is by their own free will and that not one of them has ever had any pressure put on him to keep him away from other markets. Hasn't Mr. Irwin noticed that most writers appear in more than one magazine? Gosh, what a life an editor leads!

And we've been giving *Romance* the advantage over *Adventure* in distributing it? Nope. Never once, to the best of my knowledge. Comrade Irwin overlooks the fact that *Adventure*, being issued twice as often, is twice as hard to distribute in these days when transportation doesn't transport. Same holds as to paper shortage and catching up two months lost by strike. We cuss and do the best we can for each of them and cuss, and that's all we can do.

I'VE talked a lot but I haven't half covered the ground. That's the trouble, and please note it. A magazine looks like a simple matter—all the editor has to do is to get some good stories and put 'em in it and there you are. I

wish it were like that, but it isn't. When you see something wrong with our magazine, criticize it, by all means. We honestly want your criticism. But don't, on the strength of that something that seems wrong to you, do any of these things:

(1) Don't forget that there are other readers and that they may like what you dislike.

(2) Don't forget that there may be many factors and conditions of which you ha e no knowledge.

(3) Don't be sure that the editor is necessarily a fool and a crook. Maybe he is, but give him the same chance a murderer gets—a chance to prove his innocence before he is condemned.

AND now, to be quite serious, don't get the idea that our readers treat me badly. They certainly do not. If there is a whack now and then, for every whack there are a score of hand-shakes, even some pats on the back, though I like the hand-shakes better. But there are hundreds of thousands of you and among that number there are bound to be a few who are inclined to cuss instead of criticize, to blame before they consider. And sometimes, when I get cussed for doing and for not doing the same thing at one time, I have to grin and cuss a little and tell the rest of you my troubles.

Also, *Romance* doesn't make me turn a cold shoulder to *Adventure*. I like *Romance* and I'm trying to build it into the best magazine I can, but it, like all other magazines, is not *Adventure*. It can never bring me the friends *Adventure* has brought me and still brings me.

SOME of the things Mr. Irwin says in his letter I like very much. "*Adventure* does not belong to you or the management of the Ridgway Company; it belongs to the thousands of subscribers, old and new." I think, and hope, that this is true. If it is, I'm very proud that I've helped build up a magazine that is something more than a magazine. And I like Mr. Irwin's fierce loyalty to our magazine, begging him to believe that I am fully as loyal to it as he is. If there's anything he thinks still needs explanation I'll try to make it clear to him if he'll drop into the office some time when he's in New York. Also, I appreciate his friendly help, and that of the rest of you, in helping launch our younger brother magazine. Friends that you can count on are worth while. I had to whack back in self-defense, but I like Mr. Irwin the better for his letter.

ABOUT Sam Bass and Gus Gildea from an old-timer comrade who knew them both:

Everett, Washington.

This is my first attempt to appear at your Camp-Fire but I can answer a few questions asked.

ANSWER first to comrade E. F. Kernan of Deming, New Mexico. Yes, I was personally acquainted with Gus Gildea. He lived at Brackett or Fort Clark and was a deputy sheriff of Maverick County. In '79 or '80 he went west to New Mexico and while there became involved in some trouble and was shot crosswise through the mouth, which left a hideous scar on both cheeks. He didn't stay long in New Mexico but came back to Fort Clark and while there the Southern Pacific was being built. He scouted the Devil's River and Pecos country as a deputy sheriff. He was a small man but was not afraid. Not a bad sort of a fellow. While a gunman, I would not consider him in the class of desperado. He gambled but who didn't on the front in those days?

NOW for the question from comrade Chas. B. McCafferty of Arlington, Tex. I knew Sam Bass and was within a few miles of him when killed. He was killed at Round Rock, Tex. in the early eighties by a Ranger. I was there on date and went immediately to Round Rock, but he was dead when I arrived. The Legislature was in session at Austin, only a short distance away, and they adjourned and with the Governor came to Round Rock.

Sam and two others came down to rob a country bank and stopped at Round Rock, tying their stock in an alley that a blind alley led out of or a cross alley from the Main street to the long alley. They went into a store with their pistols on and that had a bar in the rear. The deputy marshal of Round Rock went in to disarm them and Sam shot him and the three ran for their horses. Sam was behind and just as he ran in the side alley a Ranger who happened to be stopping over night, showed up and shot Sam through the body with a Winchester. He made good to his horse and rode out about three miles, got off beside the road and a farmer or milkman came along and he called him and sent word to town for them to come and get him. The authorities would hardly believe him when he told them he was Sam Bass.

I knew all of the gunmen of those times; was within four feet of Ben Thompson and King Fisher when they were killed in Jack Hines' old place in San Antonio. I don't remember the balance of song. Good night.—H. P. WHARTENBY.

YES, I believe most of us think of a bully as a coward. But here is something from G. A. Wells about the strange and contradictory character that figures in his story in this issue:

New Albany, Indiana.

There will no doubt be one or more readers of this story who remember the man whom I have called in to serve as the model for "*Devil*" *Jackson*. If they do, they will realize that I have been rather faithful in drawing his character. I am inclined to believe that I have given him a shade the better of it, making him appear less a wolf and more a lamb.

IF EVER there was a half-tamed savage he was it. He was as bad and worse than I have shown him in the story. And yet it is paradoxical that a better-hearted fellow never lived that I know of. He would think nothing of giving you the shirt off his back if he thought you needed it more than he did.

He was afraid of nothing. He was a first-class

bully, and, in view of the courage he shows in the story, that may seem strange, for we generally assume bullies to be cowards. At least I do. *Jackson*, which was not his name, seemed to take delight in maltreating and abusing the weaklings aboard; but at the same time he wouldn't take water from any man, big or little. He'd stand up and take what was coming to him until he couldn't stand up any longer, then, as I said in the story, laugh at you.

NOW the incident of *Jackson's* knocking the pin from the shackle in order to let the chain slip never happened to my knowledge; that is pure fiction. But *Jackson's* model, this man I knew, did perform a service for other men no less hazardous. And the incident of fact was directly responsible for the present story.

Leaving Manila for Japan we ran into one big blow a hundred miles or so off the northwest coast of Luzon. I do not hesitate to say that that was the worst storm I have ever experienced, and I have been through a cyclone that wiped out a quarter of a city of twenty thousand population.

Naturally there was some damage to the ship. For one thing, the pole of the foremast (corresponding to the topgallant mast in square-rigged sailing ships, I believe) cracked short off at the cap and toppled over. Nothing supported it but a few weak stays and halyards and a splinter of the pole itself. If these gave way, down would come the wreckage to kill somebody and do more damage to the ship.

NOW on a ship at sea with the waves running mountain high and the wind howling past at a hundred miles an hour the deck itself is no place for absolute safety. And, that being true will you please imagine yourself under the circumstances crawling inch by inch up a mast that sways from twenty to forty degrees from the perpendicular like a gigantic pendulum inverted? Unless you know something of the sea and of ships it will be hard for you to imagine anything like that.

Further imagine that part of the way to your goal at the top of the foremast you must ascend by a finicky Jacob's-ladder that swings you about in dizzying circles and jerks the daylights out of you. If the gods have deserted you, you get smashed against the mast with sufficient force to break every bone in your body, or else you are pitched overboard into a raging sea from which you will never emerge.

UNDER such circumstances ships' officers do not like to command men, so they ask for volunteers. You've heard of an entire ship's company stepping forth as one man to volunteer to blow up the hulk in the middle of the channel to the harbor and block the enemy. Let me say for the hazard of this particular job of clearing away the wreckage of that pole that I didn't notice anybody breaking his neck to be at it, though there were any number of courageous men in the crew.

It was a cinch, however, that the wreckage must be cleared away. The pole was threshing about high above the deck like a huge flail, threatening at any moment to break away of its own accord and come smashing to the deck.

IT WAS *alias* "*Devil*" *Jackson* who volunteered for the job. Preparing himself with a knife and an ax, up he went, hanging by his eyebrows half the time, and we below wondered how long he could stick it out. Several times in the West I have tried to ride broncs and have managed to stay aboard just long enough to know what it was like to be shipwrecked. I can imagine how the man up on the mast felt at that time. After all of half an hour he had the wreckage cut away and, under the most amazing difficulties rove lines so that the pole could be lowered away to the deck with safety.

And let me say in passing that this man eventually drew a sentence in naval prison for some dirty trick or other.—G. A. WELLS.

EXCEPT for the fact that E. B. is a woman I'd at once cry a warning against comrades fighting over the various snake-bite remedies that have been advanced. Everybody has a right to suggest his remedy or to warn against other remedies, but those of us who are just listening are all supposed not to adopt any remedy until it has been absolutely established as safe and effective.

Humboldt, Arizona.

I have just finished reading Mr. Major's letter in "Camp-Fire" and I must write you or just naturally explode. As a warning to any one who would be tempted to use his "snake-bite" remedy.

IODIN is good to cauterize any wound and a good disinfectant but strychnin and nitroglycerin are too dangerous drugs to be used with too much familiarity by the laity. He advises nitroglycerin and strychnin to be given in conjunction and in doses of one-fiftieth of a grain. The most any physician will order at one time is one-thirtieth of a grain. Now with his repeat in two hours he will have his patient taking one-twenty-fifth of a grain and that is a poisonous dose. Not only that, but he would have the dosage repeated ad infinitum. The best thing to do with strychnin and nitroglycerin is to leave them alone.

PERMANGANATE of potassium or K Mn O_4 he does not tell what to do with and *that* is your only safe remedy. Ten cents' worth of potassium permanganate crystals will cure a hundred snake-bites.

Method: Apply a tourniquet above the wound; take a sharp clean knife and pass blade through a flame enough to destroy bacteria, and make two deep incisions horizontally and laterally of the bite; after it bleeds freely rub in a few crystals of kmnoy. If you are a great distance from a doctor, ease the tourniquet about once every two hours, let the blood flow well, then stop it. The reason for this is that the tourniquet presses the arteries together and also the nerve endings, and they might glue together and therefore refuse to grow and mend with the severed tissue, and cause a local paralysis and a difficult wound to heal.

Really two hours is an awful long time to leave a tourniquet tight. To ease you should let the blood flow freely enough to show that circulation is unimpeded, this applies to all wounds where a tourniquet is needed.

In snake-bites everybody knows that the tourniquet is used to prevent the poison from going into the circulatory system, and that it should be applied between the wound and heart, preferably about four inches above wound.

I think the method I mentioned is the easier to remember, and if you haven't a fire handy don't stop to build one, use your knife and let the fresh arterial blood wash away all dirt, for arterial blood is clean.

BUT what I wanted to impress on every one is, don't use strychnin, nitroglycerin or any other toxic drugs without a reliable physician's orders. Here in our hospital none of the nurses are allowed to give any such drug without a written order of a doctor. I had a patient a few months ago and I gave him one dose during the night of a mild heart tonic and when he got very bad I kept one dose of nitroglycerin—3 minims or drops—and if that did not get the desired results, notify the physician.

If they are so particular with the nurses how much more so with the laity?—E. B.

A WORD from Farnham Bishop concerning his story in this issue:

Berkley, California.

I hope you won't mind the heroine of this story. She's a ferry-boat!

Some of her type I know were used as gunboats in the Civil War, particularly in the early days of the blockade, when the Union needed hundreds of craft in a hurry. And about twenty years ago I read in a newspaper article that one of these embattled butter-tubs had captured a richly-laden British blockade-runner that approached and hailed her at sea, because no Englishman could imagine that anything that looked like that could possibly be a warship. Anybody that wants to bother the Navy Department about whether this really happened or not is at liberty to do so.—FARNHAM BISHOP.

A COMRADE'S report as to Kit Dalton's death. And just for once I'm leaving in a bit of praise for one of the stories in our magazine. I think you won't object.

Fort Worth, Texas.

Just a few lines to let the bunch at the flame know of the passing of ol' Kit Dalton into the Land of Shadows. Kit hit the Long Trail April 5th at Memphis, Tenn. Old age did what posses were unable to do in the seventeen years he was an outlaw. With his boots off, penniless and at the age of seventy-eight at a boarding house there his career was ended.

AFTER leaving Quantrell's guerrillas he struck out with the James boys and with them took part in the hold-up of thirty-six trains, twenty-two banks and eight stage coaches. He applied the same means to a livelihood with the Sam Bass gang of Texas. Kit forsook banditry to become a gambler in Memphis when the Federal Government granted amnesty to all Civil War raiders. Then he reformed and became an Evangelist. His "square" streak cropped out.

"And the meanest damn outlaw that rode it
Had a streak in his soul that was square."

Say, I've seen some awful sights in my time and have never turned a hair and have fooled myself into believing I was hard-hearted. But darn it, I found out I was chicken-hearted as —— by reading a story in *Adventure* by Barry Scobee called "The Steer Branded Murder." I felt so doggone sorry for that po' old steer I wanted to fight somebody. That Scobee youngster (I can't think of him only as a young man) sure got my nanny with that tale.—"BINKIE" KENDAL.

AN INTERESTING look into the times in which Hugh Pendexter's story in this issue is laid. Personally, in a case of this kind I would by all means read the story itself before reading the explanation, thus both gaining a clearer and fuller understanding of the historical data given for Camp-Fire and avoiding having any of the story's plot told me in advance. But of course every fellow will follow his own inclination as to that.

Norway, Maine.

I have taken a liberty with the historical facts furnishing the background of "The Bushfighters," *i.e.*, the capture of Putnam. He was captured in 1758 and I have recorded it as being in the Fall of '56 for the sake of knitting up the action of the story. For, after all, it is intended for a story, not history.

HOWEVER, the incidents surrounding his capture and the attempts to roast him, the shower, and his rescue are facts. Parkman credits Marin with effecting the rescue; other writers have noted a tradition that Putnam's captor, the big Caughnawaga chief, was informed of his prisoner's plight by an Indian who once was Putnam's captive and had been treated kindly by him. It has also been said that Putnam appealed to Marin as a Mason and thus secured his intercession. In any event he was taken before Montcalm at Ticonderoga and afterwards conveyed to Montreal. Col. Peter Schuyler, of New Jersey, also a prisoner, who was exchanged for De Noyan, commandant at Fort Frontenac, got Putnam's name placed on the list of prisoners to be exchanged. At the time of the story Putnam was thirty-eight years old and the father of a large family. For the sake of romantic element I have introduced Ephraim Willis and the girl spy. There was at Albany at that time a Dutchman, Lydius, to whom and his daughters Vaudreuil sent costly presents and who, Loudoun claimed, was a spy.

ROGERS' scout into Lake Champlain was much as I have described it, the fiction incidents filling in and rounding out the picture. Putnam's scout to within two or three miles of Ticonderoga, his ascent of the mountain and his careful reconnaisance was one of the most important bits of scouting during the war. He made many similar trips during the war.

Rogers' amazing carelessness in shooting at a target with Lieutenant Irwin and thus warning Marin he was on his trail is a fact. Also the disposition of the provincials, regulars and rangers, with Putnam in the lead.

Young Brant served through the 1755 campaign with Johnson. Two years later Sir William sent him to school. I introduce him at the age of thirteen.

Rogers' services as a leader of rangers were invaluable to the English. There are innumerable instances of his daring and cunning. At the close of the French-Indian War he was sent to take over the French forts in the west. He accepted a commission in the English army in the Revolutionary War.

THE language used by the ranger in Chapter VIII, when he shoots and captures Captain Pean, is practically the same as used by the captor of Dieskau on his capture the year before. The incident of Jan the Rogue's girl appearing in New York tap-rooms and tea-houses in male attire was suggested by the exploit of a young woman of that time, who created a sensation by a similar prank and by spending twenty pounds in one night.

I cast back to Putnam to remark that his experience in volunteering as a sentinel at the outpost near Fort Edward after the sentinels had mysteriously disappeared, also his killing a big Indian clothed in a bearskin, are facts. Alfred P. Putnam's "Sketch of Israel Putnam," mentions Putnam's laughing at warriors who were burning him, and explains his lack of fear was constitutional.

IT WAS Colonel Jonathan Bagley who humorously assured General Winslow that every wheel would turn that "human flesh and rum" could move, etc. Saratoga in 1745 was a small settlement of Dutch farmers and the only defense of Albany "towards Canada." The fort was stockaded. It leaked so that the garrison of one sergeant and ten soldiers couldn't keep their powder dry. Neither the General Assembly nor Albany would pay for having it repaired. The garrison was withdrawn and the fort burned. On November twenty-eighth of that year, five hundred French and Indians raided the settlement, killing thirty and taking a hundred prisoners. This left Albany uncovered. The Long House ridiculed the English and said, "You burned your own fort at Saratoga and ran." The French and Indians were burning and killing in sight of Albany, and as the Iroquois had no love for the provincials at any time, and never for a people they held in contempt for shirking a fight, it was with the utmost difficulty that William Johnson won them back to neutrality. This is the episode that young Brant referred to.

SOME thirty years before the time of my story there was much smuggling between Albany and Montreal. The Mohawks held the Eastern Door and from them were drawn men who were willing to carry goods back and forth. These go-betweens gradually became converted in so far as a pagan Indian can be converted to Christianity. It was charged that they peddled information concerning colonial affairs as well as goods. They were further charged with inciting wars between the Five Nations and the southern Indians, thus eliminating the possibility of the Long House becoming an ally against the French. Strenuous efforts were made to break up the smuggling game, it being believed that, once it was done away with, the Mohawks would come back home, the French refusing to give them more presents after the usefulness ceased. From such a beginning did the Caughnawaga village of Mohawks and Oneidas spring.

The fort at Oswego was a constant menace to the French fort at Niagara. To counteract the influence of the Oswego fort the French placed trading-posts at Presqu'ile (Erie, Pennsylvania), French Creek, and Venango.

AFTER Lord Howe was killed in the attack on Ticonderoga (Putnam being by his side all through the fight) and after the incompetent Abercrombie had lost two thousand men, Colonel Bradstreet captured Frontenac and the French navy on Lake Ontario, thus sealing the fate of Fort Duquesne.

1756 is the year when Sir William Johnson "took the petticots off the Delawares and also the name of women." Of course this could only be done with the consent of the Iroquois, who had imposed the humiliating condition on the Delawares that they should call themselves "women," and publicly admit they were unfit to carry arms. The Long House had refused to give aid in the Braddock campaign because of her dislike for the Virginians; the last resulting from Virginia's claims to the Ohio lands, which the Iroquois also claimed. The attitude of the Iroquois toward the provincials is not overdrawn in my story. Three hundred offered to follow Johnson because of their love for him. The Iroquois as a confederacy desired to stand one side and watch France and England exhaust each other in battles over what the Iroquois believed to be their own lands.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

THERE are some dozens of ways of showing that our public men are to be classed as politicians, not statesmen. Generally they take up a problem only after it has become so acute that they can't avoid taking it up—a "hand to mouth" system of guiding and controlling public affairs. Think of all their arguments about food production, prices, regulation, etc. How far ahead do they look,

even those who try to look at something besides party or personal interest?

For example, suppose some one were to urge a law, local, State or national, to the effect that no trees except nut-trees should be set out along any street or highway and that a certain percentage of new trees in parks must be nut-trees. Our "statesmen" would merely laugh—if they deigned to look at the proposition at all. Why should any one expect them to bother their massive brains over roadside trees when they have so many weighty problems to consider?

And if it were urged that nuts have value as food they would, if they had the patience to talk about the trivial matter at all, tell you of the hundreds of more important crops and food industries that demanded prior attention. What they would be really interested in, however, would be "policies" and politics, parties and party measures, abstract theories of economics and so on.

NOW consider the *facts* in this little proposal about nut-trees. To put the matter concretely and concisely, an authority has stated that if nut-trees were planted along all the highways of the country the resultant food production would in twenty years equal in importance the entire live-stock industry of the United States.

Think it over. Utilization of what is now waste land so far as actual production is concerned. Black, English and Japan walnuts, hickories, butternuts, filberts, pecans—all are good-looking trees or shrubs, all produce food values of highest quality. (Get a chemical analysis of these nuts in comparison with beefsteak and other meats and with our staple vegetables. You will find them out-ranking most of these familiar ones.) If the trees die they furnish wood of exceptional value, and there are various by-products also to be considered. And, roughly speaking, nut-trees require no more care and attention, each in its proper region, than do ordinary shade-trees; far less than fruits. Also harvesting, storage and transportation are simple matters compared to potatoes, fruits, meats, etc.

IF ALL the highways could not be lined with nut-trees there is plenty of land, now unproductive and adopted to nothing but timber, that is suitable for them and on which their planting could be urged and encouraged. Indeed, people are even now beginning to realize that even good land planted to nuts is a good investment. If greater numbers would give rise to natural enemies it is as worth combatting these as it is to combat the greater hosts of pests that beset fruit orchards, field crops and market gardens—and if the tree dies the wood alone, in most of the nuts, repays cost and labor and yields profit. There would, of course, have to be regulations as to harvesting and ownership when planted along roads or on public property, but certainly it would be worth making and enforcing regulations if the value at stake were equal to even half or a tenth of the value of our livestock industry.

Think it over. It's only common sense—a practical and easy way of adding tremendously to our food production and our economic resources.

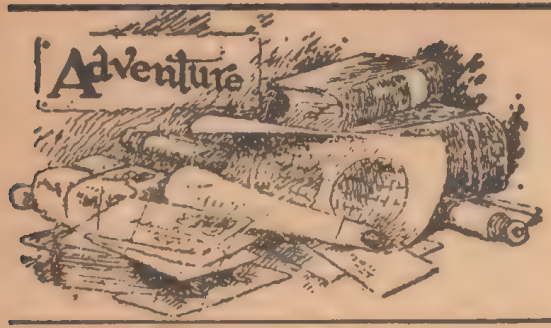
BUT it isn't a "current issue" and it isn't a subject on which most of the thinking has been done in large quantities by others, so of course our public men—politicians—have no time for it nor, not being statesmen, any appreciation of its possibilities. And of course we the people wouldn't do anything about it ourselves. Not for a generation or two anyway. Like our politicians we have not the inclination to make the nation's cause our personal cause nor have we been trained to consider the nation's problems from a really scientific point of view.

Our Departments of Agriculture, national and State, are well enough from the pseudo-scientific view-point and are often very "practical" in the narrow and common sense of the word. Perhaps they are not even behind the times. But they are certainly far, far from being real leaders of the times.

And our politicians are good politicians, damnably good, but they're not statesmen. The matter of planting nut-trees is merely a stray example of their lack of broad, far-seeing vision. Yet we leave all our national problems to be settled by them according to the dictates of party politics.

THE American people need two things: (1) education in the responsibility, obligation and power of *individual* citizenship, and (2) better means of making the people's opinions the decider of the people's problems. The people must rule and the people must be fit to rule.

Our present system of elections and exaggerated party rule is extremely inadequate democracy. We suffer under many injustices as a result. The remedy does not lie in revolution by force but in securing by lawful democratic methods the real democracy we are supposed to have yet do not have. We can do this. If we will.—A. S. H.



VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: June, Nov., Dec., 1915. All 1916 except Jan. and July. April, May, June, Aug., First Sept., Mid-Sept., First Oct., First Nov., 1917. Mid-Feb., Mid-March, First Aug., Mid-Aug., Mid-Nov., First Dec., 1918. First March, First May, First June, First July, First Aug., First Sept., First Dec., 1919. First Jan., Mid-Jan., First Feb., Mid-Feb., 1920. Fifteen cents each. Express C. O. D.—Address MRS. BESS SEARCY, 312½ 6 Ave., South, Nashville, Tenn.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service!

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 519 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliablity. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1309 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the Bristish Empire should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, 6 W. Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel, *Especially* early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, 1101 Kimball B'ld'g, Chicago, Ill. Covering Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure* Magazine, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

★(*Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached*)
Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering southeastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries. Part 6
H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. North American Snow Countries Part 7
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Richmond, Quebec. Covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper and wood-pulp industries, land grants, water-power.

20. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

21. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

22. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

23. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

24. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

25. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, 1555 Wilcox Ave., Hollywood, Calif. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports, manufacturing.

26. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

27. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing, explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

28. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

29. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

30. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

31. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Care Society of Authors and Composers, Central Buildings, Tothill St., Westminster, London, England. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

32. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

33. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shot-guns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shot-Guns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S. its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

New Rifle

THE new rifle mentioned by Mr. Wiggins may have been brought on the market before this item reaches you, but even so it will probably prove to be an interesting bit of news to some of the Ask Adventure readers:

Question:—"Some months ago I wrote you regarding the .280 Ross rifle and you advised me to wait and get a .27 caliber that would be on the market in a short time. I have never been able to see this rifle advertised. Has it been put on the market yet and if so who manufactures it?

Which rifle would you advise—.30 Newton or Winchester 1895 .30-06? Kindly give me the accurate range of .30 Newton; and is the recoil very severe?"—W. R. WAGNER, JR., Cross Plains, Texas.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—One of the largest arms factories in the United States has perfected a .270 caliber rifle, of the bolt-action type, that will have a muzzle velocity of 3,300 feet seconds and a tremendous striking power. I do not know the bullet weight, but things point to about 140 grains. I am not at liberty to tell just what company it is that is preparing this rifle. It has been announced for June but I don't believe it will be here by that date.

For my own shooting, I would prefer the Winchester .30-06 to the .30 Newton, as I find the recoil of the latter rifle too heavy for my own ideas; also it seems to burn too much powder outside the muzzle for the best of work of which it would be capable if fitted with a longer barrel. I would prefer a Newton chambered for the .30-06 to either of the above weapons for my own use.

I think the extreme range of the .30 Newton would be about 6,000 yards but have no figures to support this. Its energy at fifteen hundred is 285 f. s. with the 150-grain bullet, and 408 with the 172-grain bullet. As to accurate shooting distance, I really would not care to guess.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to Ask Adventure editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply coupons for answer.

Work and Rents in Tasmania

THIS inquirer receives definite and exhaustive information upon the subjects concerning which he asks, for the reason that he asks about specific things, and at the same time gives some necessary information about himself. This correspondence will be a revelation to those of our friends who content themselves by writing to an Ask Adventure editor, "Please tell me all you know about the region you cover." Moral: If you want some definite information to go on, ask the "A. A. man" some definite questions to base his answers on:

Question:—"Having had your name given me as one from whom information could be obtained regarding climatic conditions and prospects in both Tasmania and Australia, I am writing you to ask a few particulars regarding both these places, in which I am at present interested.

I may say I have been in Canada for the past fifteen years, having been with the Canadian Pacific Railway Co. for five years as draftsman in their irrigation branch, and have now been with the Department of Interior, Irrigation Branch, for the past ten years, excepting four years whilst in active service, forty-two months of which I spent in France and Belgium. I am a discharged man now, and am classified A-1 in health, am 5 feet 11 inches high and weigh 178 lbs.; 41 years of age, and in perfect health; married, family nil. Being tired of the cold climate and high altitude here, I desire to make a change.

I will take any position, but do not intend to go farming, as I have had no experience which would fit me to make a success of it.

My time with the C. P. R. and Dominion government has been mostly taken up with drafting work. I am an experienced architectural draftsman, also engineering draftsman; I can run level and transit on survey work.

I have a preference for Tasmania, should there be any encouragement there, but should the prospects in Australia be better for one of my experience I would go there.

Now you know my desires, the lines along which I have trained, particulars regarding my health, age and where my desires attract me to. Can you advise me which is the best step to take; what wage I would likely be able to earn, where or to whom I should apply for particulars of or a position in which my past training would prove most remunerative to me, and at the same time be most useful to my employer?

Can you give me an idea as to cost of living, rent, furniture, and also about what a house would be worth? I own my house here, and could get about $3,000 for it. I also have it well furnished; value of furniture about $3,000, making a total of $6,000.

Can you tell me whether it would be wise to sell furniture and buy again, or to move it? I would require a house or bungalow of five rooms at least. About what is building material worth?

No doubt you will think I am very inquisitive, but nothing ask, nothing learn. If you could give me any information along the lines asked, I would appreciate it to the full.

I may say it is not my desire for adventure that prompts me to write you, but I must make a change from this cold climate and high altitude, as it is beginning to seriously affect my wife's health, she having been here for twelve years. Altitude 3,500 feet above sea level."—JOS. CAWTHORN, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Goldie:—Although our cities are overcrowded and I usually advise intending settlers here to go into the back country, I think in your case I would advise you to come direct to Sydney, which is now a city of nearly a million people, and where there should be plenty of opportunities for architectural or engineering draftsmen. Sydney is really the metropolis of Australia, although Melbourne is the Federal capital.

Melbourne being only about 500 miles from Sydney you should be able to get in touch with the best opportunities that are offering in the two leading cities of the Commonwealth. At the same time you will, through the medium of the Tasmanian government agency here, be able to ascertain all you wish to know regarding the position in Tasmania.

The ordinary immigrant is usually taken care of at our well-conducted Immigration Department here, where he is looked after and where jobs are found for him. In your case, however, it will really be necessary for you to personally canvas the field as it would all depend on your personality and ability. The country is growing rapidly and times generally are good. Therefore I think you should have no difficulty in securing a position that would be satisfactory to you.

The cost of living is increasing here as everywhere else, but is not quite as high as in U. S. A. Rents are high in Sydney, but not so bad in other centers. Here you would have to expect to pay 25/ to £2 per week for an ordinary villa of from four to six rooms, according to locality. Flats are very expensive, but if you are prepared to live a little way out of the city, or in the country, you could be accommodated very cheaply.

Our cities are growing outward, and transportation facilities are becoming better all the time, and as rentals have increased so much in and near the cities people are taking to living some distance out so as to secure the benefit of the lower rentals and the healthier life. Our railways, which are owned by the government, are considerate of the suburban dwellers, and you can get commutation tickets on the railway very reasonably. You can journey to suburbs about 15 to 20 miles from the city at from 3/ to 4/ per week.

I certainly would advise you to sell your furniture and buy again over here as we possess many furniture factories and are turning out household requirements at about the same price as you would pay in America or Canada.

If you desire to buy a house or bungalow of about five rooms as you suggest you would have to expect to pay from £750 to £1,000 according to locality, and even more than this if you desire to live in one of the more fashionable sections of the city. All our best bungalows are built of brick, which we find to be the most suited to this climate as it provides warmth in the Winter and coolness in the Summer. However, they are now going in for the half-brick, half-wooden structures such as you find in California; and in the working man's suburbs the homes are built almost entirely of weather-board.

The price of all building material has gone up very greatly of late, and building is becoming so expensive that it is really wisest to look for the best chance of buying a ready-made home, which you can secure on easy terms, the usual arrangements being ten per cent. deposit and the balance over a long term of years.

I can quite appreciate your desire to change from Alberta to Australia. I spent a short time in Western Canada and am not anxious to go there again; not because I do not appreciate the attraction of the country and its great possibilities, but because I found the cold most trying.

In Australia we never have to suffer from the climate in any way. We speak of the weather in the usual formal manner, but we are never really seriously inconvenienced by the changes of climate.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to Ask Adventure editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply coupons for answer.

A Vacation Trapping Trip

THE auto-truck seems to have been added to the shanty-boat as an aid to the footloose trapper, judging by the subjoined brace of letters:

Question:—"Thank you very much for your kind letter. I don't care so much for adventure but I want to take a vacation of some sixty days about October first and I can not content myself loafing nor hunting or fishing for any length of time. Trapping is about all I've ever done during vacation.

I do not expect to get a thousand dollars' worth of fur, but if I can only catch enough to pay the expense of our trip we will be satisfied. Would like to have found a location where we could get some skunk, mink, muskrats.

Have you ever been down on the Humboldt River in Nevada? Thought some of going in near Winnemucca and going up the Little Humboldt and then work back again. I want to get out where we will be alone in an uninhabited part, if I can. If any muskrats or mink I can get my share.

Four years ago an old trapper and myself trapped a river up in Wisconsin. Were gone three weeks and caught five hundred and forty muskrats and ran through thirteen sets of other trappers; but we could not do it now as there is a trap about every rod the whole length of the river. Only way to get fur now is to get away back where other fellows don't care to go.

Could a man run a boat and carry his camp and supplies on the Green or Humboldt Rivers? What material can he get for fuel? How about drinking and cooking water? Is any to be had through that country or is it all bad water?

Possibly you can tell me more than any one else. If you write to residents they often say trapping is good when the facts in the case are that a man possibly catches eighteen or twenty muskrats in a season. Others say no good when there would be plenty for a man who knows the business.

Kindly inform me as best you can. No hurry about it; any time you get spare time."—C. C. NOLF, Orangeville, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—They told me there is good trapping here and there all through that Nevada country. Water is scarce. We got the rankest of alkalis right there at Green River opposite Vernal.

Get U. S. Topographical Survey Index sheets, Director U. S. Geological Survey, Washington, D. C., and get maps of the Duchesne country—showing mountains, etc. The Wasatch Mountains hit my eye, I sure wanted to go to Mt. Gilbert—timber up there, great fishing, not much fur, but *good* fur up there. Two days' travel to the mountains from the river valley, toward the south. Right through there, wolves right bad.

Nevada is just desert valley and desert mountains. We saw trappers that called Nevada fine—two lads in auto—$3,000 last Winter coming from Utah to southern California, in a Ford outfit. You'd do better in a little Ford truck outfit, wandering around out there prospecting, than taking any man's word for it.

I believe there's good trapping in that back country of Nevada, Utah, Western Colorado. I saw tracks—muskrats; not plenty, though. For

them I'd hit north into Minnesota, Wisconsin, or go to Ft. Benton, Mont., and come down Missouri. There's 3,000 miles of river, and you couldn't help but find trapping, shanty-boating down the Missouri. You could come flying, or you could take your time —two months, or six.

And on Missouri—otter, beaver (protected), mink, rats, skunks, coyotes, etc. Mink out of that country migrated down to big streams in droughts two years ago—they're along the main stream.

Hit a slough, spot trap three days, drop down, hit another, etc., 300 or 3,000 miles below you, all you wanted.

I'd say Missouri, unless you want the look and feel of the desert. Personally I'd hit the Missouri, or get a Ford and cruise the country. Put on Goodrich or Goodyear cord tires and oversize. I know automobile trappers are making money.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

WATKINS, MORRIL (Turk). Just returned from your home town in Pa. Your parents need you. Get in touch with me.—Address A. G. WEBB, Arcade Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

DE LISLE, FRANK A. One time of De Lisle & Cooper, contractors, Detroit. Now believed to be employed by a chemical company in New York City as salesman. Any information will be appreciated.—Address A. B. C., P. O. Box 605, Butler, Pa.

FORSYTH, THOMAS. Left home in Cornwall, Ont., Canada, forty-five years ago, bound for the gold fields of California. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write his stepbrother.—ARCHIBALD THOMSON, 987 Tupper St., Montreal, Canada.

KIERSTEAD, JAMES AMOS Dark hair, six feet tall, scar on right side of chin. Left home in Eastern Texas, August, 1896. Not heard of since. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address JOHN A. KIERSTEAD, Box 305, Belt, Mont.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

HAYES, FRANK F. Forty-eight years old, five feet eight inches tall, 180 pounds, black hair, dark brown eyes. Occupation, hatter. Left home twelve years ago. Once lived in Norwalk, Conn. Any one having information concerning this man should communicate with WM. E. BURTON, Bridgeport, Conn.

ANY member of former Promethean Pub. Co. of Chicago, please write.—Address DR. H. D. RIBBLE, Blacksburg, Va.

WHITTEMORE, ARTHUR R. Formerly of Palo Alto, Cal. Served in the late war in the gunners gang aboard the *U. S. S. South Dakota*. Write your old pal from the Wilds of Oregon.—SID A. USHER, 63 Hood St., W. Lynn, Mass.

BASS, EDGAR LEE. Formerly of Van Buren, Ark. Went overseas in Aug., 1918, with 153 Inf. Write your old pal.—SGT. JOYCE N. RIGGS, O. Q. M. G. O., P. & S., Munitions Bldg., Washington, D. C.

PRIME, MORT. (Father.) Last heard of at Lead City, So. Dak., about twenty-five years ago. Native of Brooklyn, N. Y. Any one knowing the whereabouts of this man notify M. L. F., care of *Adventure*.

CLEGG, ARTHUR. Brother. Left Grantville, Salmon River, Montana, in 1869 or 1870 with a party of miners bound for the Windy River region of the Black Hills. The party was caught in the mountains and spent a Winter there. In the Spring they were attacked by Indians but fought their way to British Columbia and escaped. I should like to hear from any one who survived, or knows anything concerning former members of the party.—Address A. S. CLEGG, Gevens Sanitarium, Stamford, Conn.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

STERLING, WILLIAM. Father. Husband of Clara Bell Fortune. Lived in Kansas. Had two children, boy and girl. Wife left him twenty-five years ago, taking children. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—MRS. IRENE BUZZA, Green River, Utah.

LILLY, W. A. Last heard of in Phœnix, Ariz. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—Address FRANK LILLY, Frisco, Texas.

ALLEN, JEROME. Tall, dark, and about fifty years old. Married. Last heard of in Okla. about twenty years ago. Any information as to his whereabouts pleaes write his sister.—Address MRS. IRENE SAUNDERS, Box 203, Kiefer, Okla.

LATIMER, REV. Last heard of in 1917. Was Chaplain, Canadian Forestry Corps, Headquarters, District No. 1, Alençon, France. Would like to hear from you. Have been in America for several months.—Address ALBERT NEVEN, 162 Sawyer St., New Bedford, Mass.

EASTMAN, EDWARD J. Last heard of in Oregon eight years ago. Was railroad, lumber and smelter man. Any information will be appreciated by his relatives.—Address FRANK SIMPSON, 407 Paris St., San Francisco, Cal.

COUTANT, FRED I. Last heard from in Green Gables Sanitarium, Lincoln, Nebr., and thought to have been a 2nd Lieut. in the Medical Corps, U. S. Army.—Address RALPH H. COUTANT, care of Truxillo Railroad Co., Honduras, Central America.

BENTLEY, MILTON REYNOLDS. Son of Hiram Bentley of Ravenna, Ohio, and brother of Ella Ann Bentley-Meacham of Kent, Ohio. About five feet seven inches tall, and weighs one hundred and forty pounds. Married Lucy Beyers and had one son, Theodore. Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—L. H. MEACHAM, 1310 Michigan St., Toledo, Ohio.

CALLAHA, MORRIS, alias Morris Kessler. (Colored.) Age about thirty-two. Last heard of at Boone Mills, Va., twenty-nine years ago. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MARY SAMPLES, 481 Chestnut St., Conemaugh, Pa.

HILL, ERNIE C. Formerly of Fort Wayne, Ind. Left the *U. S. S. Rhode Island* at Boston in May, 1919. Also any other old shipmates in the *Rhody's* black-gang of 1918-1919 please write S. E. ELFTMAN, 1407 E. 39th St., Kansas City, Mo.

ROBEL, JAMES F. Communicate with your brother.—Address CHAS. J. ROBEL, P. O. Box 368, West Chester, Pa.

McCOY, GEORGE. 1st Lieut. U. S. Medical Corps. Write to CARL ROBESON, Ex.-Engr. Capt. R. N. G., care of E. C. Wardler, 922 Woodville St., Toledo, Ohio.

FOLEY, C. W. (Mickey.) Formerly with 1st A. M. G. Bn., A. E. F. Mike, would like to hear from you.—RAYMOND Y. NEFF, Box 624, Bartlesville, Okla.

YOUNG, JACK. Formerly with 1st A. M. G. Bn., A. E. F. Jack, would like to hear from you.—Address RAYMOND Y. NEFF, Box 624, Bartlesville, Okla.

ESTVAN, JOSEPH. Thirty-six years old, five feet, nine inches tall, 168 pounds, dark brown hair, gray eyes, mustache, pock marks, Slavish. Left wife and three children in Bridgeport, May 31, 1919. Occupation, laborer. Last heard of in Castle Shannon, Alleghany County, Pa. Any one having information concerning this man should notify WILLIAM E. BURTON, Washington and Madison Avenues, Bridgeport, Conn.

HOWARD, CHARLIE. Please write your dad at Kingfisher. You have a letter sent in care of *Adventure*. Have it forwarded to your address. Important.—JOE JONES, Kingfisher, Okla.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Roy Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieut. Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; A. Gaylord; E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; H. E. Copp; L. E. Patten; T. T. Bennett; J. E. Warner; Sinn Cardie; C. E. Wilson; R. W. Kimsey.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First September or Mid-September issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

ANDERSON, Charles W.; Ballard, Dave; Bastian, Walter; Black, Donald; Bushnell, Lucius Hamilton; Christianson, Chris; Cleaveland, George C.; Urquhart Clan; D'Arcy, Mike; Darlington, James B.; Grasme, Erwin; Hartnett, Jack; Japenga, Jacob Orie; Linn, Cyrus H.; Massby, Samuel Settle; Munn, John Clancey; Peppard, Gerald A.; Perras, Clement; Porter, Mel; Sheets, Robert; Smith, Geo. W.; Smoky Pete; Stiegler, Bernhardt; Stone, Nallie Russell; Tainton, Blair A.; Thayer, Mrs. Blanche V.; Thrift, Alexander; Vinson, Edward; Winnie, Leon Lowden; Woodruff, Emmett.

MISCELLANEOUS—A. W. B. Members of Co. L, 32nd U. S. V. Inf. and Sgts. Wyant, Bohanan, Culver, Lieut. Boyle.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

BEATON, SGT. MAJOR G. M.; Benson, Edwin Worth; Bertsch, Elizabeth; Bonner, Major J. S.; Mrs. Brownell; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; "Chink"; Coles, Bobby; Cook, Elliot D.; Cook, William N.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Crashley, Wm. T.; Eager, Paul Roman; Erwin, Phil; Fairfax, Boyd; Fisher, Edward E.; Fisher, Sgt. R.; Garson, Ed.; Gordon, W. A.; Green, Billy; Green, W.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hart, Jack; Harwood, J.; Heffman, J. M.; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Jackson, Robert R.; Kohlhammer, Jack; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kuhn, Edward; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Larisey, Jack; Lauder, Harry; Lee, Dr.; Lee, Capt. Harry, A. R. C.; Lee, Dr. William R.; Lewis, Warburton; "Lonely Jock"; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; MacDonald, Tony; Madsen, Sgt. E. E.; Martel, Leon H.; Nelson, Frank Lovell; O'Hara, Jack; Parker, G. A.; Parker, Dr. M.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Phipps, Corbett, C.; Rich, Wagoner, Bob; Rinkenback, Frank; Rundle, Merrill G.; Schmidt, G.; Scott, Pvt. James F.; Swan, George L.; Tripp, Edward N.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Wheeler, S. H.; Williams, W. P.; J. C. H.; L. T. 348; S. 177284; 439; WS-XV.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you. Address L. B. BARRETTO, care of *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD
FIRST NOVEMBER ISSUE

In addition to the long story mentioned on the second contents page, the next *Adventure* will contain seven short stories, a novelette and an instalment of the serial now running.

TOMBSTONE CANCELS A DEBT — *By Boyd Fleming*
A rancher who couldn't forget.

***EL CAPITÁN* ARRRNIE** — *By Chester L. Saxby*
Seaman *Arrrnie* seeks promotion.

THE UNHOLY ONE — *By Ferdinand Berthoud*
In the African *veldt* the kaffirs rise against the whites.

THE WAYS OF WILLIAM SKIPP — *By Russell A. Boggs*
Ups and downs of railroad life.

THE LIAR — *By Captain Dingle*
On a South Sea Island two men meet in a test of courage.

TOYAMA Part IV — *By Patrick Casey*
Gold in the burning sands—and men of four nations fighting for it.

FORTY-FOUR AND THE LIMB OF SATIN — *By Ruby Erwin Livingston*
A dusky expert with the bones takes on a job that is delicate—and dangerous.

THE FIREFLY — *By Arthur O. Friel*
In the jungles of Brazil false lights lead men astray.

BARS OF GOLD. A Complete Novelette — *By M. J. Phillips*
A stage-coach hold-up and what came of it.

Don't pass by

And let that corn keep hurting

Don't pass a drugstore that sells Blue-jay if you ever suffer corns.

Blue-jay stops the corn pain. A simple touch applies it. And soon the toughest corn will loosen and come out.

The Blue-jay way is gentle, easy, sure. It comes in plaster or in liquid form.

It is scientific—a product of this world-famed laboratory.

Millions now employ it. Most of the corns that develop are being ended by it.

Compare it with old methods, harsh and uncertain. Learn what folly it is to merely pare and pad corns.

Use Blue-jay on one corn tonight. Watch that corn go. Then remember that every corn can thus be ended the moment it appears. A week-old corn should be unknown in these days.

B&B Blue-jay

Plaster or Liquid

The Scientific Corn Ender

BAUER & BLACK Chicago New York Toronto

Makers of Sterile Surgical Dressings and Allied Products

With acknowledgments to K. C. B.

Never again on the movie stunts

I WATCHED a guy.
IN A movie show.
RIDE THE same plug.
NINE THOUSAND miles.
AND FIRE his six-shooter.
ALL AFTERNOON.
WITHOUT RE-LOADING.
AND THEN, in a close-up.
HE ROLLED a smoke.
WITH JUST one hand.
AND I tried it myself.
FIRST WITH one hand.
THEN WITH two.
THEN WITH my mouth.
AND THE forty-third trial.
STAYED PUT long enough.
FOR ME to light it.
AND I thought I had it.
AND THEN it spilled,
LIKE A Roman candle.
AND BURNED the rug.
AND BURNED my clothes.
AND EVERYTHING.
SO I'M convinced.
I'LL NEVER get.
THAT ACTOR'S job.
AND I know now.
THAT THE only things.
I CAN roll with one hand.
ARE ROLLICKING dominoes.
AND I'M going to stick.
TO MY regular smokes.
FOR THEY satisfy.

EVER see a "close-up" of *real* cigarette contentment? Get next to any Chesterfield smoker, and watch him register *"they satisfy!"* It's all in the blend of those choice Turkish and Domestic tobaccos—and that's a secret that nobody can imitate.

They Satisfy **Chesterfield**
CIGARETTES
Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co.